GENESIS

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



In the beginning God: creation, the fall, the flood, and the promises that point to Jesus Christ

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A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of Genesis. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

Ever since I was a child I wondered where everything came from. The idea that everything came from nothing never made sense to me. Something had to come first, and I would rather believe in God than in nothing producing everything. I cannot fully answer where God came from, and I do not have to. Scripture says He has always been, and that makes more sense to me than anything else. Genesis starts there: In the beginning, God.

Genesis is the book of beginnings. It tells us where the world came from, where we came from, how sin entered the world, and how God began His plan to save us. Every major teaching of the Bible starts here. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on Genesis. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand His Word from the very first page. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in Genesis. It is history, written as history, and the rest of the Bible treats it that way. Jesus spoke of Adam and Eve, Abel, Noah, Abraham, and Lot as real people (Matthew 19:4-6; Luke 11:51; Luke 17:26-32; John 8:56). Paul built his teaching about sin and salvation on Adam and Abraham (Romans 4; Romans 5:12-19). Jesus and the apostles built their teaching on these people and events as real, so this study reads them that way too.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. Genesis is real history, and this study takes Moses at his word: God made the heavens and the earth, Adam and Eve were real people, the flood really happened, and God really did call Abraham and make His covenant with him and his descendants.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Hebrew, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- People and Places: in chapters that bring in many new names, a short list explaining the people, places, and terms.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live.
- Old and New Testament links: after many verses you will find a short line in small type that lists the places where the other Testament quotes, fulfills, pictures, or echoes that passage. "Quoted" means the New Testament quotes the Old Testament words. "Fulfilled" means the New Testament tells us a prophecy or promise came true. "Pictured" means the New Testament itself points to an Old Testament person, event, or object as a picture of Christ. "Alluded to" means a clear echo in shared words or pictures. Every link is listed again in a table at the back of the book.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of Genesis. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of Genesis

Genesis is the first book of the Bible and the first of the five books of Moses, often called the Law or the Torah. The name Genesis comes from a Greek word meaning "origin" or "beginning." The Hebrew title is the book's first word, which means "in the beginning."

Genesis falls into two main parts. Chapters 1 to 11 cover the whole human race: creation, the fall, the first murder, the flood, and the tower of Babel. Chapters 12 to 50 slow down and follow one family: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. God calls one man, Abraham, and promises that through him and his descendants all the families of the earth will be blessed (12:3). The rest of the Bible tells how God kept that promise, ending in Jesus Christ.

Moses marked the sections of the book with a repeated heading, translated in the SLB as "These are the generations of," or once, at 5:1, "This is the book of the generations of" (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2). Each one opens a new part of the story. The heading for Esau appears twice, at 36:1 and again at 36:9 for his family in Seir, so you will sometimes see the count given as ten and sometimes as eleven.

A note on the name of God: in the SLB, when you see "LORD" in capital letters, it stands for God's personal name, Yahweh, which He made known to Moses (Exodus 3:14-15). When you see "Lord" in regular letters, it translates a word that means master. When you see "God," it usually translates Elohim, the general Hebrew word for God. Genesis uses all of these.

Genesis has 50 chapters and 1,533 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: The Beginning of the World (chapters 1 to 11)

- Chapters 1 and 2: Creation
- Chapters 3 to 5: The fall and its results
- Chapters 6 to 9: The flood
- Chapters 10 and 11: The nations and the tower of Babel

Part Two: The Beginning of God's People (chapters 12 to 50)

- Chapters 12 to 25: Abraham (Isaac's birth and marriage come in this part)
- Chapters 25 to 36: Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau (Isaac dies in chapter 35)
- Chapters 37 to 50: Joseph

Background of the Book

Author: Genesis does not name its author, but Jewish and Christian tradition have long held that Moses wrote it, along with the next four books. Jesus spoke of the Law as the writings of Moses (Luke 24:44; John 5:46-47). Moses was not alive for the events in Genesis, so he would have used records and accounts handed down from earlier generations, guided by the Holy Spirit. Many modern scholars believe Genesis was put together from several sources long after Moses, and a few later notes in the text, such as place names updated for later readers, are often pointed to. I hold that Moses wrote it, and that a few of those notes may have been added by later scribes.

Who it was written to: The people of Israel, in the wilderness after God brought them out of Egypt. Genesis told them who their God was, where they came from, and why God was giving them the land of Canaan.

When it was written: During Israel's forty years in the wilderness. Many conservative scholars place the exodus around 1446 B.C., which would date Genesis to the 1400s B.C. Others place the exodus in the 1200s B.C.

Time covered: From creation to the death of Joseph in Egypt. Scripture does not give us a date for creation, and I won't try to set one. Adding up the ages Genesis gives, the call of Abraham to the death of Joseph covers about 285 years.

Purpose: To show that God is the Creator of all things, that sin came into the world through man, and that God began, right after the fall, His plan to save a people for Himself through the promised Seed (3:15). Genesis also lays the foundation for God's covenant with Israel, a covenant He has never broken.

Chapter 1: Creation

Scripture

1:1-13 In ***the*** beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formlessness and emptiness, and darkness ***was*** over the face of ***the*** deep, and the Spirit of God ***was*** hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let ***there*** be light," and ***there*** was light. And God saw the light, that ***it was*** good; and God separated between the light and the darkness. And God called the light "Day," and the darkness He called "Night." And ***there*** was evening and ***there*** was morning, day one. And God said, "Let ***there*** be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it be separating between waters and waters." And God made the expanse, and He separated between the waters which ***were*** under the expanse and the waters which ***were*** above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse "Heavens." And ***there*** was evening and ***there*** was morning, a second day. And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered to one place, and let the dry land be seen." And it was so. And God called the dry land "Earth," and the gathering of the waters He called "Seas." And God saw that ***it was*** good. And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plant seeding seed, fruit tree making fruit according to its kind, whose seed ***is*** in it, on the earth." And it was so. And the earth brought forth vegetation, plant seeding seed according to its kind, and tree making fruit whose seed ***is*** in it according to its kind. And God saw that ***it was*** good. And ***there*** was evening and ***there*** was morning, a third day.

1:14-25 And God said, "Let ***there*** be luminaries in the expanse of the heavens to separate between the day and the night, and they shall be for signs and for appointed times and for days and years, and they shall be for luminaries in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great luminaries, the great luminary for the rule of the day and the small luminary for the rule of the night, and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate between the light and the darkness. And God saw that ***it was*** good. And ***there*** was evening and ***there*** was morning, a fourth day. And God said, "Let the waters swarm ***with*** swarms of living beings, and let flying things fly over the earth on the face of the expanse of the heavens." And God created the great monsters and every living being that moves, ***with*** which the waters swarmed, according to their kind, and every winged flying thing according to its kind. And God saw that ***it was*** good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let the flying things multiply on the earth." And ***there*** was evening and ***there*** was morning, a fifth day. And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living beings according to their kind: livestock and moving things and living things of the earth according to their kind." And it was so. And God made the living things of the earth according to their kind, and the livestock according to their kind, and every moving thing of the ground according to its kind. And God saw that ***it was*** good.

1:26-31 And God said, "Let Us make mankind in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the flying things of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every moving thing that moves on the earth." And God created mankind in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the flying things of the

heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Look, I have given to you every plant seeding seed that ***is*** on the face of all the earth, and every tree in which ***is*** the fruit of a tree seeding seed; to you it shall be for food. And to every living thing of the earth and to every flying thing of the heavens and to everything that moves on the earth in which ***is*** a living being, every green plant ***is*** for food." And it was so. And God saw all that He had made, and look, ***it was*** very good. And ***there*** was evening and ***there*** was morning, the sixth day.

Chapter 1 Preview

The Bible opens with God. Before there is a sun, a sea, or a single human being, God is already there, and by His word He makes everything that exists. Over six days He shapes a world that is dark and empty into a home full of light, life and order. Again and again He looks at what He has made and calls it good.

On the sixth day God makes man and woman in His own image and gives them the job of ruling over the earth under Him. When He is finished, He calls it "very good." Everything else in the Bible builds on this chapter. If we want to know who God is, who we are, and why the world is the way it is, we have to start here.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1 *In **the** beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

"In the beginning God." The Bible does not argue for God's existence. It starts with Him. He was there before the beginning, and He is the reason there is a beginning at all.

The Hebrew word for "God" here is Elohim. It is plural in form, but the verb "created" is singular. Many Christians see in this an early hint of what the rest of Scripture makes clear: one God who exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. John 1:1-3 tells us the Word, Jesus, was there in the beginning and that all things came into being through Him.

"Created" translates a Hebrew word that in the Bible is used only for God's work. People make things out of materials that already exist. Hebrews 11:3 adds that what we see was not made out of things that were already there: God brought the universe into being out of nothing. "The heavens and the earth" is a way of saying everything that exists.

This verse answers the deepest question a person can ask: where did all of this come from? The answer is a Person. You are not an accident. The world was made on purpose, by Someone who had a purpose for it, and that includes you.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:3 (alluded to); John 1:1 (alluded to); 2 Peter 3:5 (alluded to)

1:2 *And the earth was formlessness and emptiness, and darkness **was** over the face of **the** deep, and the Spirit of God **was** hovering over the face of the waters.*

When God first made the earth, it was "formlessness and emptiness." It had no shape yet and nothing living on it. Darkness covered the deep waters. It was not yet a place where people could live.

Then comes a beautiful line: "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." The word "hovering" pictures the way a bird hovers over its nest (Deuteronomy 32:11 uses the same word). The Holy Spirit was there at creation, ready to bring order and life.

The rest of the chapter shows God working on these two problems. In days one through three He gives the world form. In days four through six He fills it. God takes what is empty and dark and makes it full and good. He still does that in human lives.

1:3-5 *And God said, "Let **there** be light," and **there** was light. And God saw the light, that **it was** good; and God separated between the light and the darkness. And God called the light "Day," and the darkness He called "Night." And **there** was evening and **there** was morning, day one.*

"And God said." Ten times in this chapter God speaks, and each time it happens. He does not wrestle with the material or struggle to get His way. He simply speaks, and the universe obeys. Psalm 33:6 says the heavens were made by the word of the LORD.

Light comes first, even before the sun (1:14-16). God Himself is the source of light (Revelation 21:23 and 22:5 describe a city that needs no sun because God is its light). God "separated between the light and the darkness" and named them. In the ancient world, to name something showed authority over it.

"And there was evening and there was morning, day one." The day is counted from evening, which is still how the Jewish day begins. This phrase repeats at the end of each of the six days.

New Testament links: 2 Corinthians 4:6 (alluded to)

1:6-8 *And God said, "Let **there** be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it be separating between waters and waters." And God made the expanse, and He separated between the waters which **were** under the expanse and the waters which **were** above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse "Heavens." And **there** was evening and **there** was morning, a second day.*

On the second day God made "an expanse," a space between the waters below and the waters above. The older translations call it the "firmament." He named it "Heavens," meaning the sky.

We aren't told exactly what "the waters which were above" were. Some think of clouds and the water in the air. Others think of a different arrangement of the world before the flood. I don't believe we need to settle it to see the main point: God took one great mass of water and divided it, making room for the sky and, soon, for dry land.

The second day is the only day where the words "God saw that it was good" don't appear. The work of dividing the waters isn't finished until the third day, when it is called good.

1:9-13 *And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered to one place, and let the dry land be seen." And it was so. And God called the dry land "Earth," and the gathering of the waters He called "Seas." And God saw that **it was** good. And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plant seeding seed, fruit tree making fruit according to its kind, whose seed **is** in it, on the earth." And it was so. And the earth brought forth vegetation, plant seeding seed according to its kind, and tree making fruit whose seed **is** in it according to its kind. And God saw that **it was** good. And **there** was evening and **there** was morning, a third day.*

On the third day God gathered the waters into "one place" so that "the dry land" appeared. He named them "earth" and "seas," and He called it good.

Then the land produced plants. The phrase "according to its kind" shows up here for the first time, and it repeats all through the chapter. God built order into living things. Plants produce plants like themselves, and every seed carries the pattern for the next generation. Life comes from life, and all of it comes from God.

By the end of day three the world has its shape: light and darkness, sky and sea, land and plants. The rooms of the house are built. Now God will furnish them.

New Testament links: 2 Peter 3:5 (alluded to)

1:14-19 *And God said, "Let **there** be luminaries in the expanse of the heavens to separate between the day and the night, and they shall be for signs and for appointed times and for days and years, and they shall be for luminaries in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great luminaries, the great luminary for the rule of the day and the small luminary for the rule of the night, and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate between the light and the darkness. And God saw that **it was** good. And **there** was evening and **there** was morning, a fourth day.*

On day four God made the sun, moon and stars. Genesis doesn't even use the names "sun" and "moon." It calls them "the great luminary" and "the small luminary." Many of the nations around Israel worshiped the sun and moon as gods. Genesis quietly puts them in their place: they are lamps God hung in the sky. The closing words, "and the stars," are almost an aside. Billions of stars, and Genesis mentions them in a single short phrase.

These lights have jobs. They give light, they are "for the rule of the day" and of the night, and they are "for signs and for appointed times and for days and years." God's calendar for Israel's feasts would later be set by the moon and the sun. If the sky is full of God's handiwork, it makes no sense to look to the stars for guidance. Look to the One who made them (Isaiah 40:26).

1:20-23 *And God said, "Let the waters swarm **with** swarms of living beings, and let flying things fly over the earth on the face of the expanse of the heavens." And God created the great monsters and every living being that moves, **with** which the waters swarmed, according to their kind, and every winged flying thing according to its kind. And God saw that **it was** good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let the flying things multiply on the earth." And **there** was evening and **there** was morning, a fifth day.*

Day five fills the sea and the sky that God formed on day two. The waters "swarm with swarms of living beings," and birds fly across the sky. "The great monsters" means the huge creatures of the ocean. Whatever the people of that day feared in the sea, God made it, and it answers to Him.

For the first time God "blessed" what He made: "Be fruitful and multiply." A blessing in Scripture is God's favor spoken over someone, usually with the power to make it happen. God wanted His world full of life. He is generous, and the sheer variety of fish and birds shows it.

1:24-25 *And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living beings according to their kind: livestock and moving things and living things of the earth according to their kind." And it was so. And God made the living things of the earth according to their kind, and the livestock according to their kind, and every moving thing of the ground according to its kind. And God saw that **it was** good.*

On day six the land is filled with animals: "livestock and moving things and living things of the earth," wild animals. Each again comes "according to their kind," and God saw that it was good.

The land animals were made on the same day as man. We share the same ground with them, and in some ways our bodies are like theirs. But the next verse will show a great difference between us and every animal God made.

1:26 *And God said, "Let Us make mankind in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the flying things of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every moving thing that moves on the earth."*

The pace of the chapter changes. Until now God has said, "Let there be" or "Let the earth bring forth." Now He says, "Let Us make mankind." It is as if God pauses to take counsel with Himself before the crowning act of creation.

Who is "Us"? Some say God is speaking with the angels, but angels are never said to create anything, and man is made in God's image, not the angels' image. Others say it is a way kings spoke of themselves. I believe, with many Christians through the centuries, that it is the first hint of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit together, one God (compare 1:2 and John 1:3).

"In Our image, according to Our likeness" means that man was made to reflect God. We are not God, and we are not little gods. But we can think, love, choose, make things, speak, and know our Creator. No animal was made this way. Being made in God's image is also why every human life has worth, whether young or old, strong or weak, born or unborn (9:6 builds on this).

God also gave man a job: "let them have dominion." To have dominion means to rule. Man was to rule over the earth as God's representative, the way a king's governor rules a province for him. That is a trust, not a license to abuse what He made. We will answer to the real King for how we treat what He made.

New Testament links: James 3:9 (alluded to); Colossians 3:10 (alluded to)

1:27 *And God created mankind in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

This verse is written as poetry in Hebrew, and the word "created" appears three times. The writer slows down because this is the high point of the chapter.

"Male and female He created them." Both the man and the woman bear God's image. Neither one is more in God's image than the other. Jesus quoted this verse when He taught about marriage (Matthew 19:4). Our being male or female is part of God's good design, not an accident or a mistake.

Genesis 1:27 also tells us that Adam and Eve were real people, made directly by God. Jesus and Paul both treated them that way (Matthew 19:4-6; Romans 5:12-14). Our dignity doesn't come from what we can do or how others see us. It comes from the One whose image we carry. That is true of the person you like least, too.

New Testament links: Matthew 19:4 (quoted); Mark 10:6 (quoted); 1 Corinthians 11:7 (alluded to); Colossians 3:10 (alluded to)

1:28 *And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the flying things of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

God "blessed them," just as He blessed the sea creatures and birds, but this time He spoke "to them." Man is the one creature God talks with. The blessing has two parts. The first is "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." Children are a gift and a blessing from God (Psalm 127:3).

The second part is to "subdue it" and "have dominion." To subdue the earth means to bring it under order and make it useful: to farm it, build on it, care for it and develop it. Work was part of God's plan before sin ever came into the world. In chapter 2, Adam is given a garden to tend. Your daily work, done for the Lord, is part of this first command.

This command is sometimes called the creation mandate. It still stands. Sin made the job harder (3:17-19), but God never took it back.

1:29-31 *And God said, "Look, I have given to you every plant seeding seed that **is** on the face of all the earth, and every tree in which **is** the fruit of a tree seeding seed; to you it shall be for food. And to every living thing of the earth and to every flying thing of the heavens and to everything that moves on the earth in which **is** a living being, every green plant **is** for food." And it was so. And God saw all that He had made, and look, **it was** very good. And **there** was evening and **there** was morning, the sixth day.*

God gave man and the animals plants for food. Meat is not mentioned as food until after the flood, when God gives it in 9:3. Many who read Genesis this way believe there was no death among God's creatures before the fall. The world was still "very good," and chapter 3 will show how death came in.

Now the verdict on all of it: "look, it was very good." Six times God called His work good. Now, with man and woman in place, He calls it "very good." There was nothing broken in the world God made. No sin, no sickness, no death. When we look at the pain in the world today, Genesis 1 reminds us it was not this way from the start. Chapter 3 will tell us what went wrong.

"There was evening and there was morning, the sixth day." I believe the days of Genesis 1 were ordinary days. Each one has a number and an evening and a morning, and when God gave Israel the Sabbath, He pointed back to this week: in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth (Exodus 20:11). Bible-believing Christians have held other views. The day-age view sees each day as a long age. The framework view sees the days as a literary pattern, not a sequence of time. The gap view places a long period between verses 1 and 2. These brothers and sisters love the Bible too. But I believe the plainest reading is six ordinary days, and that is how this study reads them. The Bible gives no date for creation, and I won't put a number on the age of the earth.

New Testament links: 1 Timothy 4:4 (alluded to)

Chapter 1 Summary

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. The earth was at first formless and empty, and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. Over six days God spoke and brought order and life: light, sky and seas, dry land and plants, sun, moon and stars, sea creatures and birds, and land animals. Each time He saw that it was good. On the sixth day He made man, male and female, in His own image, blessed them, and gave them the task of filling the earth and ruling over it under Him. He gave them plants for food, and when He looked at all He had made, it was very good.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. What do the first four words of the Bible tell us about God? (1:1)

2. What was the earth like at first, and who was hovering over the waters? (1:2)

3. Each time God spoke, it happened (1:3, 6, 9). What does that tell you about the power of His word, and how might it change the way you read the Bible?

4. Genesis calls the sun and moon only lights that God hung in the sky (1:14-18), though many nations worshiped them. What do people look to today in place of God, and why?

5. What phrase keeps repeating about plants and animals, and what does it tell us? (1:11-12, 21, 24-25)

6. How is the creation of man different from the creation of everything else? (1:26)

7. What does it mean to be made in the image of God? (1:26-27)

8. What two parts of God's blessing did He give to the man and woman? (1:28)

9. Since every person is made in God's image, how should that change the way you treat people you find hard to love?

10. God gave people work before sin came into the world. How could seeing your daily work as part of God's plan change how you do it?

Chapter 2: The Garden and the First Marriage

Scripture

2:1-3 And the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their host. And God completed on the seventh day His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it He rested from all His work which God had created to make.

2:4-17 These ***are*** the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day ***that*** the LORD God made earth and heavens. And no shrub of the field was yet on the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not caused ***it*** to rain on the earth, and there ***was*** no man to work the ground. And a mist would go up from the earth and would water all the face of the ground. And the LORD God formed the man ***of*** dust from the ground, and He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and He put there the man whom He had formed. And the LORD God caused to sprout from the ground every tree desirable in appearance and good for food, and the tree of life in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And a river was going out from Eden to water the garden, and from there it was divided and became four heads. The name of the one ***is*** Pishon; it ***is*** the one that goes around all the land of Havilah, where the gold ***is***. And the gold of that land ***is*** good; the bdellium and the onyx stone ***are*** there. And the name of the second river ***is*** Gihon; it ***is*** the one that goes around all the land of Cush. And the name of the third river ***is*** Tigris; it ***is*** the one that goes east of Assyria. And the fourth river, it ***is*** Euphrates. And the LORD God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From every tree of the garden you may surely eat; and from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat from it; for in the day you eat from it you shall surely die."

2:18-25 And the LORD God said, "***It is*** not good ***for*** the man to be alone; I will make for him a helper corresponding to him." And the LORD God formed from the ground every living thing of the field and every flying thing of the heavens, and He brought ***them*** to the man to see what he would call it; and whatever the man called it, a living being, that ***was*** its name. And the man called names for all the livestock and for the flying things of the heavens and for every living thing of the field; and for Adam he did not find a helper corresponding to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on the man, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs and closed up flesh in its place. And the LORD God built the rib which He had taken from the man into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And the man said, "This ***one*** this time ***is*** bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh; this ***one*** shall be called 'Woman,' because from man this ***one*** was taken." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And they were both of them naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed.

Chapter 2 Preview

Chapter 2 opens with God resting on the seventh day, His work of creation finished. Then the camera moves in close. Chapter 1 gives us the big picture of the whole universe. Chapter 2 zooms

in on the sixth day and shows us how God forms the first man from the dust, breathes life into him, and places him in a garden called Eden to work it and keep it.

God gives the man one command and one warning. Then He says something surprising: it is not good for the man to be alone. So God makes the woman from the man's side and brings her to him. The chapter ends with the first marriage, God's own pattern for husband and wife, and a man and woman who stand before each other and before God with nothing to hide.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1-3 *And the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their host. And God completed on the seventh day His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it He rested from all His work which God had created to make.*

"And the heavens and the earth were completed." Nothing was missing. God did not rest because He was tired. Isaiah 40:28 says He does not become weary. He rested because the work was done. The word "rested" is the root of the word Sabbath, which means to stop or cease.

God "blessed the seventh day and sanctified it." To sanctify means to set apart as holy. Later God built this pattern into Israel's week with the Sabbath command (Exodus 20:8-11). The seventh day is the only day in Genesis 1 and 2 without the closing words "there was evening and there was morning." Hebrews 4:9-10 speaks of a rest that remains for God's people, a rest we enter by trusting in Christ's finished work instead of our own.

God set a rhythm of work and rest into creation. We are not machines. Taking time to stop, worship and rest is a way of trusting that God holds the world together while we sleep.

Hebrews 4:4 quotes this verse: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works." The writer uses these words to show that God's rest has been open since creation, waiting for His people to enter it.

New Testament links: Hebrews 4:4 (quoted); Hebrews 4:10 (alluded to)

2:4-6 *These **are** the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day **that** the LORD God made earth and heavens. And no shrub of the field was yet on the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not caused **it** to rain on the earth, and there **was** no man to work the ground. And a mist would go up from the earth and would water all the face of the ground.*

The heading "These are the generations of" appears about eleven times in Genesis. It marks the start of a new section of the book, much like a chapter heading. Here it introduces a closer look at the creation of man.

For the first time we read "the LORD God." As we saw in the Overview, LORD in capital letters stands for God's personal name, Yahweh. Chapter 1 showed us God as the mighty Creator of

everything. Chapter 2 shows us that same God as the LORD, who comes close and enters a personal relationship with the people He made.

Verses 5-6 describe the land before man was placed on it. There were no cultivated plants yet, no rain, and "no man to work the ground." A mist watered the ground instead. The world was waiting for a gardener.

2:7 *And the LORD God formed the man **of** dust from the ground, and He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*

This verse shows both our humble origin and our high dignity. God "formed the man of dust from the ground." The word "formed" is the word for a potter shaping clay (Jeremiah 18:6). God did not speak man into being from a distance. He shaped him by hand, so to speak.

The Hebrew word for man is adam, and the word for ground is adamah. Our name reminds us where we came from. We are made of dirt. That should keep us humble.

But then God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." No other creature receives life this way. Man is more than a body. He has a spirit from God, and he "became a living being." Every breath you take is borrowed from the One who gave the first one. Paul quotes this verse when he compares Adam, the first man, with Jesus, the last Adam, who gives life to all who belong to Him (1 Corinthians 15:45).

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 15:45 (quoted); 1 Corinthians 15:47 (alluded to); 1 Timothy 2:13 (alluded to); John 20:22 (alluded to)

2:8-9 *And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and He put there the man whom He had formed. And the LORD God caused to sprout from the ground every tree desirable in appearance and good for food, and the tree of life in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

God "planted a garden in Eden, in the east." The name Eden likely means delight or pleasure. God prepared a beautiful, fruitful home before He placed the man in it. Every tree there was "desirable in appearance and good for food." God cares about beauty as well as usefulness.

Two trees stood in the middle of the garden. "The tree of life" gave life, and in Revelation 22:2 it appears again in the New Jerusalem. "The tree of the knowledge of good and evil" was the tree of testing. To eat from it would be to decide for yourself what is good and evil, instead of trusting God to define it. The rest of the Bible is the story of how we lost access to the first tree and how God, through Christ, opens it to us again.

New Testament links: Revelation 2:7 (alluded to); Revelation 22:2 (alluded to); Revelation 22:14 (alluded to)

2:10-14 *And a river was going out from Eden to water the garden, and from there it was divided and became four heads. The name of the one **is** Pishon; it **is** the one that goes around all the land of Havilah, where the gold **is**. And the gold of that land **is** good; the bdellium and the onyx stone **are** there. And the name of the second river **is** Gihon; it **is** the one that goes around all the land of Cush. And the name of the third river **is** Tigris; it **is** the one that goes east of Assyria. And the fourth river, it **is** Euphrates.*

A river flowed out of Eden and divided into four. Two of them, the Tigris and the Euphrates, are well known rivers in what is now Iraq. The other two, the Pishon and the Gihon, are not known today, and the lands of Havilah and Cush are hard to place with certainty.

So where was Eden? Genesis doesn't pin it down, and honest Bible teachers disagree. Many think it was somewhere in Mesopotamia, near the Tigris and Euphrates. I believe the flood in chapters 6 to 9 changed the face of the earth so much that we can no longer trace the garden's exact location. The Tigris and Euphrates we know today may have been named after the earlier rivers. What matters is that Eden was a real place, not a fairy tale.

The mention of gold, bdellium (a sweet-smelling resin) and onyx stone shows that God filled the earth with treasures for man to find and use.

2:15 *And the LORD God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.*

God put the man in the garden "to work it and to keep it." Work was part of paradise. Adam was not placed in Eden to lounge. He was given a job, and it was a good job.

The two verbs are worth a closer look. To work means to work and serve the ground. To keep means to guard and protect it. Later these same two verbs are used together of the priests who served and guarded the tabernacle, the large worship tent Israel later built in the wilderness, where God met with His people (Numbers 3:7-8). Many see the garden as the first sanctuary, the place where God met with man, and Adam as its first priest and caretaker. Our work, done before God, can be an act of worship.

2:16-17 *And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From every tree of the garden you may surely eat; and from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat from it; for in the day you eat from it you shall surely die."*

God's first words to the man are generous: "From every tree of the garden." There was only one tree off limits. God gives far more than He holds back.

Then the one restriction and its warning: "in the day you eat from it you shall surely die." Adam and Eve did not drop dead the moment they ate, so what did God mean? I believe the warning came true in two ways. That very day they died spiritually, cut off from God, hiding in shame (3:8). And that same day the process of physical death began; Adam would return to dust (3:19; 5:5). Romans 5:12 tells us death came into the world through sin.

God gave Adam a real choice. Love that is forced is not love. The one tree gave Adam the chance to trust and obey his Maker freely.

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 15:22 (alluded to)

2:18 *And the LORD God said, "**It is** not good **for** the man to be alone; I will make for him a helper corresponding to him."*

After we have heard "good" seven times in chapter 1, this verse is startling: "It is not good for the man to be alone." Nothing was wrong with Adam, and sin had not entered. Even so, God said something was not yet good. We were made for relationship.

God's answer is "a helper corresponding to him." The word helper does not mean someone less important. The same Hebrew word is used of God Himself, who is Israel's helper (Psalm 33:20). It describes the role, not the worth. "Corresponding to him" means one who is like him and yet different, a partner who completes what is lacking. The woman is the man's match, not his servant.

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 11:9 (alluded to)

2:19-20 *And the LORD God formed from the ground every living thing of the field and every flying thing of the heavens, and He brought **them** to the man to see what he would call it; and whatever the man called it, a living being, that **was** its name. And the man called names for all the livestock and for the flying things of the heavens and for every living thing of the field; and for Adam he did not find a helper corresponding to him.*

Before God made the woman, He brought the animals to Adam to name them. Naming showed Adam's authority over the animals, as God had commanded in 1:28. It also took careful thought. Adam had to study each creature to give it a fitting name.

Along the way, Adam would have noticed something. Each animal had a mate, and none of them was like him. "For Adam he did not find a helper corresponding to him." God let Adam feel his need before He met it. Sometimes God lets us feel what is missing so that we receive His gift with gratitude.

2:21-22 *And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on the man, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs and closed up flesh in its place. And the LORD God built the rib which He had taken from the man into a woman, and He brought her to the man.*

God put Adam into "a deep sleep" and took "one of his ribs." The Hebrew word can also mean side. The woman was taken from beside the man, not from his head to rule him, nor from his feet to be walked on, but from his side, to stand with him. That is an old saying among Bible teachers, and it fits the passage well.

Then God "built" the rib into a woman. And God brought her to the man. God Himself gave away the first bride. Marriage was God's idea from the beginning.

New Testament links: 1 Corinthians 11:8 (alluded to)

2:23 *And the man said, "This **one** this time **is** bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh; this **one** shall be called 'Woman,' because from man this **one** was taken."*

Adam's response is the first recorded human words in the Bible, and they are poetry. "This one this time is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh." You can almost hear his joy. After naming all the animals, he finally sees one like himself.

She "shall be called 'Woman,' because from man this one was taken." In Hebrew the words sound alike: ishah (woman) and ish (man). Her name shows that she shares his nature. Man and woman are equal in worth and made for each other, while each has a distinct role.

New Testament links: Ephesians 5:30 (alluded to)

2:24 *Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

Here Moses, the writer of Genesis, steps back and draws the lesson for every marriage that follows: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh."

Three things happen in a marriage. There is leaving: a new family begins, and the husband's first human loyalty moves from his parents to his wife. There is joining: the word means to cling or hold fast, like glue. Marriage is a covenant, a binding promise made before God, not just an agreement that lasts as long as feelings do. And there is becoming one flesh, a union of two whole lives that includes the physical union of husband and wife.

Jesus quoted this verse when He was asked about divorce, and He added, "What God joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:4-6). God's pattern is one man and one woman, for life. Paul quotes it too, and says it points to a deeper mystery: Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:31-32). Every Christian marriage is meant to be a living picture of how Jesus loves His people and how His people respond to Him.

Paul also quotes the words "will become one flesh" in 1 Corinthians 6:16, to warn believers that sexual union is never just a physical act. God made it to bind two lives together for good.

New Testament links: Ephesians 5:31 (quoted); 1 Corinthians 6:16 (quoted); Mark 10:7-8 (quoted); Matthew 19:5 (quoted); Matthew 19:6 (alluded to)

2:25 *And they were both of them naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed.*

"And they were both of them naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed." They had nothing to hide from each other or from God. There was no guilt, no fear, no pretending.

This verse sets up chapter 3. The very next thing that happens after sin enters is that they know they are naked and try to cover themselves (3:7). Shame came with sin. The good news is that God does not leave us in our shame. He will provide a covering in 3:21, and finally He clothes us in the righteousness of Christ (Isaiah 61:10).

Chapter 2 Summary

God finished His work of creation and rested on the seventh day, blessing it and setting it apart. Then Genesis gives a closer look at the making of man. The LORD God formed the man from the dust and breathed into him the breath of life. He planted a garden in Eden, watered by a river that divided into four, and put the man there to work it and keep it. He let him eat from every tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, warning that eating from it would bring death. Seeing that it was not good for the man to be alone, God brought the animals to him to name, and then made the woman from his side and brought her to him. Adam rejoiced over her, and God established marriage: a man leaves his parents, is joined to his wife, and the two become one flesh. The man and his wife were naked and not ashamed.

People and Places

- Eden: the region where God planted the garden; the name likely means delight.
- Pishon: one of the four rivers from Eden; its location is unknown today.
- Havilah: a land known for gold, near the Pishon; its location is uncertain.
- Gihon: one of the four rivers from Eden; its location is unknown today.
- Cush: a land around the Gihon; later in the Bible, Cush usually means the region south of Egypt.
- Tigris and Euphrates: two great rivers of Mesopotamia, in what is now Iraq.
- Assyria: a land and later a powerful empire along the Tigris River.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. What did God do on the seventh day, and why? (2:1-3)

2. How was the way God made man different from the way He made the animals? (2:7)

3. To eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was to decide for yourself what is good and evil (2:9, 17). Where do you see people doing that today, and where are you tempted to do it?

4. What job did God give the man in the garden? (2:15)

5. God gave Adam every tree but one (2:16-17). Why do you think God gave him a real choice, and what does that say about love and trust?

6. What did God say was "not good," and how did He solve it? (2:18, 21-22)

7. Why do you think God had Adam name the animals before He made the woman? (2:19-20)

8. What three things does 2:24 say happen in a marriage?

9. How does God's design for marriage in 2:24 speak to marriages today, including your own or those around you?

10. God built rest into the week from the beginning. What would it look like for you to take that seriously?

Chapter 3: The Fall

Scripture

3:1-7 And the serpent was more shrewd than every living thing of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; and from the fruit of the tree which ***is*** in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it, and you shall not touch it, lest you die.'" And the serpent said to the woman, "You shall not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." And the woman saw that the tree ***was*** good for food, and that it ***was*** a delight to the eyes, and the tree ***was*** desirable to make ***one*** wise; and she took from its fruit and ate, and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they ***were*** naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made for themselves loin coverings.

3:8-19 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking about in the garden at the wind of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from before the LORD God among the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where ***are*** you?" And he said, "I heard Your sound in the garden, and I was afraid because I ***was*** naked, and I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you ***were*** naked? Have you eaten from the tree which I commanded you not to eat from?" And the man said, "The woman whom You put with me, she gave to me from the tree, and I ate." And the LORD God said to the woman, "What ***is*** this ***that*** you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." And the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you ***are*** cursed more than all the livestock and more than every living thing of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you ***on the*** head, and you shall bruise him ***on the*** heel." To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain and your pregnancy; in sorrow you shall bear children; and to your husband ***shall be*** your desire, and he shall rule over you." And to Adam He said, "Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it,' cursed ***is*** the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat it all the days of your life. And thorns and thistles it shall cause to sprout for you, and you shall eat the plant of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for from it you were taken; for you ***are*** dust, and to dust you shall return."

3:20-24 And the man called the name of his wife Eve, because she was the mother of every living ***one***. And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them. And the LORD God said, "Look, the man has become like one of Us, in knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever—" And the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. And He drove out the man; and He caused to dwell at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the flame of the sword that was whirling, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Chapter 3 Preview

Chapter 2 ends with a man and woman in a perfect garden, naked and unashamed. Chapter 3 tells us how it all went wrong. A crafty serpent questions God's word, twists it, and then denies it outright. The woman eats the forbidden fruit, gives some to her husband, and he eats too. Their eyes are opened, but not the way they hoped. They feel shame, they hide from God, and when He comes looking for them, they blame someone else.

God pronounces judgment on the serpent, the woman and the man. Yet right in the middle of the judgment, He gives the first promise of a Savior: the Seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head. God clothes Adam and Eve with garments of skin and sends them out of the garden. Every sorrow in the world since then traces back to this chapter, and so does every hope of rescue.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1 *And the serpent was more shrewd than every living thing of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"*

"And the serpent was more shrewd than every living thing of the field." Genesis doesn't explain right away who was speaking through this animal, but the rest of the Bible does. Revelation 12:9 calls the devil "the ancient serpent." Jesus said the devil was a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies (John 8:44). Satan used the serpent the way a person might use a mask.

His first move was a question: "Has God indeed said?" He did not start by attacking God openly. He started by planting doubt. He also twisted God's words. God had said they could eat freely from any tree but one (2:16-17). Satan asked whether God had said they could not eat from "any tree of the garden?" making God sound harsh and stingy.

That is still his favorite method. He gets us to question whether God really said what He said, and whether God is really good. Whenever you hear a voice, inside or out, that makes God's commands sound like a cage, be careful. That is an old voice.

New Testament links: 2 Corinthians 11:3 (alluded to); Revelation 12:9 (alluded to); Revelation 20:2 (alluded to)

3:2-3 *And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; and from the fruit of the tree which **is** in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it, and you shall not touch it, lest you die.'"*

The woman answered correctly at first: "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat." But then she added something God had not said. God never said, "and you shall not touch it." She also left out the word "surely" from "you may surely eat" and softened the warning a bit.

We aren't told why she added to God's word. Maybe Adam passed the command on to her with an extra fence around it. Maybe she was already starting to see God's command as harsher than it was. Either way, a small change to God's word left her more open to the next lie. Adding to God's word is as dangerous as taking away from it (Proverbs 30:6).

3:4-5 *And the serpent said to the woman, "You shall not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

Now Satan stops hinting and openly contradicts God: "You shall not surely die." God said, "you shall surely die." Satan said, "You shall not." It is the first lie in the Bible, and it is a direct denial of God's word.

Then he attacks God's motives: "For God knows" that if you eat, "you will be like God." He made God sound jealous, as if He were holding them back from something good. The irony is that they were already like God; they were made in His image (1:26). The lie offered them something they already had, on terms that would destroy them.

At the heart of every temptation is this same offer: you can be your own god. You can decide good and evil for yourself. You don't need to trust anyone else.

3:6 *And the woman saw that the tree **was** good for food, and that it **was** a delight to the eyes, and the tree **was** desirable to make **one** wise; and she took from its fruit and ate, and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.*

The woman looked at the tree, and three things drew her. It was "good for food." It was "a delight to the eyes." And it was "desirable to make one wise." John describes the same three pulls: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life (1 John 2:16). Satan's tools have not changed. Jesus faced this same kind of testing in the wilderness, and where Adam failed, Jesus stood firm (Matthew 4:1-11).

"She took from its fruit and ate." Then "she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate." Adam was right there. He did not step in or speak up. Eve was deceived, but Adam sinned with his eyes open. That is why the New Testament says sin entered the world "through one man" (Romans 5:12). As the head of the family, Adam bore the responsibility.

New Testament links: 1 Timothy 2:14 (alluded to); Romans 5:12 (alluded to)

3:7 *And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they **were** naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made for themselves loin coverings.*

Satan promised their eyes would be opened, and they were. But what they saw was their own nakedness. They knew good and evil now, but they knew evil by experience, from the inside. The first fruit of sin was shame.

So "they sewed together fig leaves." It was the first attempt at covering sin by human effort. It didn't work. Fig leaves wilt. People still try to cover their guilt with good deeds, religion, excuses or keeping busy. None of it lasts. Only God can cover sin, as we will see in verse 21.

3:8 *And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking about in the garden at the wind of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from before the LORD God among the trees of the garden.*

The man and his wife "heard the sound of the LORD God walking about in the garden at the wind of the day." That phrase suggests God had come to meet with them before, perhaps often. This time, instead of running to Him, they "hid themselves."

Sin always breaks fellowship with God. People who once walked with Him now hid among the trees He had planted. Their relationship with God, with each other, and even with creation is now broken. And sin makes us foolish. Nobody can hide from God (Psalm 139:7-12).

3:9-13 *And the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where **are** you?" And he said, "I heard Your sound in the garden, and I was afraid because I **was** naked, and I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you **were** naked? Have you eaten from the tree which I commanded you not to eat from?" And the man said, "The woman whom You put with me, she gave to me from the tree, and I ate." And the LORD God said to the woman, "What **is** this **that** you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

"Where are you?" God knew exactly where Adam was. The question was for Adam's sake. God was calling him to come out and face what he had done. In His grace, God came seeking the sinner before the sinner came seeking God. Jesus said He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).

Adam's answer shows his fear: "I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself." God asked him directly whether he had eaten from the tree. Instead of confessing, Adam blamed: "The woman whom You put with me." He blamed his wife, and he blamed God for giving her to him. Eve blamed the serpent: "The serpent deceived me."

Passing the blame came along with the first sin, and we have been doing it ever since. Real repentance stops pointing fingers and simply says, "I sinned." God promises to forgive when we do (1 John 1:9).

New Testament links: 2 Corinthians 11:3 (alluded to); Revelation 12:9 (alluded to); 1 Timothy 2:14 (alluded to)

3:14 *And the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you **are** cursed more than all the livestock and more than every living thing of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.*

God did not ask the serpent any questions. He went straight to judgment. "You are cursed more than all the livestock." The serpent would crawl on its belly and "dust you shall eat." Eating dust was a picture of total defeat and humiliation (Micah 7:17).

Many Bible teachers believe this curse falls on two levels at once. The serpent as an animal is cursed, and every snake crawling through the dust is a reminder of the fall. But the curse is aimed most of all at the one who used the serpent, Satan himself. He is a defeated enemy.

3:15 *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you **on the** head, and you shall bruise him **on the** heel."*

This verse is the first promise of the gospel in the Bible. The word gospel means good news, and many Christians call this verse the first gospel. Right in the middle of pronouncing judgment, God announced how He would rescue the world.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman." Enmity means hostility, a state of war. God would not let Satan keep the human race as a willing ally. There would be a battle between Satan's "seed," those who follow his ways (John 8:44), and the woman's "seed." The word seed means offspring or descendants. It can mean many children or one child. When it points to Christ, this study capitalizes it: the Seed.

Then the promise narrows down to one Person: "he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel." The same Hebrew word is used for both blows, but they land in very different places. A blow to the heel hurts, but it heals. A blow to the head is fatal. One descendant of the woman would be wounded by Satan, yet would deal Satan a deathblow.

The New Testament shows us who this is. Jesus was "born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4). At the cross, Satan struck His heel. Jesus suffered and died. But in dying and rising again, He crushed the serpent's head, breaking the power of sin, death and the devil (Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8). Paul echoes this verse when he promises that God "will crush Satan under your feet quickly" (Romans 16:20). The final blow comes when the devil is thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10).

It is worth stopping here. Before God said a word about pain in childbirth or thorns in the ground, He promised a Savior. Grace came before the curse was even finished.

New Testament links: Revelation 12:17 (alluded to); Romans 16:20 (alluded to)

3:16 *To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain and your pregnancy; in sorrow you shall bear children; and to your husband **shall be** your desire, and he shall rule over you."*

To the woman God said, "I will greatly multiply your pain and your pregnancy." The very thing that would bring the promised Seed into the world, the bearing of children, would now come with pain.

"And to your husband shall be your desire, and he shall rule over you." Bible teachers read this in two main ways. Some read "desire" as a longing for her husband even when he treats her badly. Others note that the same words appear in 4:7, where sin's "desire" is for Cain and Cain is told to "rule over it," and read it as a desire to control her husband, with the husband pushing back by ruling harshly. Either way, the loving partnership of chapter 2 is now strained by sin. Husbands ruling harshly over their wives is a result of the fall, not God's design. In Christ, husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25).

New Testament links: 1 Timothy 2:15 (alluded to)

3:17-19 *And to Adam He said, "Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it,' cursed **is** the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat it all the days of your life. And thorns and thistles it shall cause to sprout for you, and you shall eat the plant of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for from it you were taken; for you **are** dust, and to dust you shall return."*

Adam's judgment begins with the reason: "Because you listened to the voice of your wife" instead of the voice of God. Then: "Cursed is the ground because of you." God did not curse Adam himself, but the ground he worked. Work was good before the fall. Now it would come with "pain" and "thorns and thistles." God said, "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread." Romans 8:20-22 says all of creation was subjected to futility and groans while it waits to be set free.

The final sentence is the hardest: "For you are dust, and to dust you shall return." The warning of 2:17 came true. Death entered the world. Every funeral since then has been an echo of this verse.

And yet Jesus wore a crown of thorns (John 19:2), a sign of this very curse placed on His head. He took the curse on Himself so He could redeem us from it (Galatians 3:13). One day there will be no curse at all (Revelation 22:3).

New Testament links: Romans 8:20 (alluded to); Hebrews 6:8 (alluded to)

3:20-21 *And the man called the name of his wife Eve, because she was the mother of every living **one**. And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them.*

After hearing the sentence of death, Adam named his wife "Eve," which sounds like the Hebrew word for life, "because she was the mother of every living one." I believe that was an act of faith. Adam had just heard that the woman's Seed would defeat the serpent, and he took God at His word.

Then "the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them." For skins to be made, an animal had to die. This may be the first death in the Bible, an animal's death, and God Himself provided it to cover their shame. Their fig leaves were replaced by God's own provision. Many Bible teachers see here the first hint of sacrifice, a picture fulfilled when Jesus died so that we could be clothed in His righteousness. Hebrews 9:22 says that "apart from shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

3:22-24 *And the LORD God said, "Look, the man has become like one of Us, in knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever —" And the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. And He drove out the man; and He caused to dwell at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the flame of the sword that was whirling, to guard the way to the tree of life.*

"The man has become like one of Us, in knowing good and evil." The "Us" echoes 1:26. Man now knew evil by doing it, not by God's wisdom.

God then sent them out of the garden so they would not "take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" in their fallen state. That was a mercy. Living forever in a body of sin and death,

cut off from God, would be a nightmare. God closed one door so He could open a better one through Christ.

At the east of the garden God placed "the cherubim," powerful angels who guard God's holy presence, "and the flame of the sword that was whirling, to guard the way to the tree of life." Later, cherubim were woven into the curtain of the tabernacle that kept people out of the Most Holy Place, the inner room where God's presence dwelt, which only the high priest could enter, once a year (Exodus 26:31; Hebrews 9:7). When Jesus died, that curtain was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). The way back to God was opened, and in Revelation 22:14 the redeemed have the right to the tree of life once more.

New Testament links: Revelation 2:7 (alluded to); Revelation 22:14 (alluded to)

Chapter 3 Summary

The serpent, used by Satan, questioned and twisted God's word and then denied it, promising the woman she would be like God. She ate the forbidden fruit and gave some to Adam, who ate too. Their eyes were opened to their shame, and they covered themselves with fig leaves and hid from God. When God called to them, Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. God cursed the serpent and promised that the woman's Seed would crush its head, the first promise of the gospel, fulfilled in Jesus. He sentenced the woman to pain in childbirth and conflict in marriage, and cursed the ground so that the man would toil until he returned to dust. Adam named his wife Eve, God clothed them with garments of skin, and He sent them out of Eden, guarding the way to the tree of life with cherubim and a flaming sword.

When I was struggling with alcohol, I worked hard to mask my breath so no one would know I had been drinking. I found ways to cover what I was doing instead of confessing it. That was my own fig leaf. Covering sin never fixes it. It only adds hiding on top of the sin.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. How did the serpent first approach the woman, and how did he twist God's words? (3:1)

2. The woman added to God's command (3:3). Why is it dangerous to add to God's word, or to take away from it?

3. What lie did the serpent tell, and what did he say about God's motives? (3:4-5)

4. The fruit was good for food, a delight to the eyes and desirable to make one wise (3:6). Which of these three pulls do you feel most, and how did Jesus answer the same kind of testing (Matthew 4:1-11)?

5. What did Adam and Eve do after they sinned, and why didn't it work? (3:7-8)

6. How did Adam and Eve each respond when God questioned them? (3:12-13)

7. What does God promise in 3:15, and how does the New Testament show it fulfilled in Jesus?

8. What did God do for Adam and Eve in 3:21, and what might it teach us?

9. Where do you see yourself using "fig leaves" or shifting blame instead of confessing sin to God?

10. God came looking for Adam before Adam came looking for God. How does that encourage you today?

Chapter 4: Cain and Abel

Scripture

4:1-16 And the man knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and she said, "I have acquired a man with the LORD." And again she bore his brother, Abel. And Abel was a shepherd of a flock, and Cain was a worker of ***the*** ground. And it came about at the end of days, and Cain brought from the fruit of the ground an offering to the LORD. And Abel, he also brought from the firstborn of his flock and from their fat. And the LORD looked to Abel and to his offering, and to Cain and to his offering He did not look. And Cain burned ***with anger*** exceedingly, and his face fell. And the LORD said to Cain, "Why do you burn ***with anger***, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, ***is there*** not a lifting up? And if you do not do well, sin ***is*** crouching at the door; and to you ***is*** its desire, and you shall rule over it." And Cain said to Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, and Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. And the LORD said to Cain, "Where ***is*** Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. ***Am*** I my brother's keeper?" And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood ***is*** crying out to Me from the ground. And now you ***are*** cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer give its strength to you; a wanderer and a fugitive you shall be on the earth." And Cain said to the LORD, "My iniquity ***is*** too great to bear. Look, You have driven me today from the face of the ground, and from Your face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a wanderer and a fugitive on the earth, and it will be ***that*** everyone who finds me will kill me." And the LORD said to him, "Therefore, anyone who kills Cain, sevenfold he shall be avenged." And the LORD put a sign for Cain, so that anyone who found him would not strike him. And Cain went out from before the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

4:17-26 And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he was building a city, and he called the name of the city according to the name of his son, Enoch. And to Enoch was born Irad; and Irad fathered Mehujael; and Mehujael fathered Methushael; and Methushael fathered Lamech. And Lamech took for himself two wives; the name of the one ***was*** Adah, and the name of the second ***was*** Zillah. And Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of dwellers ***in*** tents and ***with*** herds. And the name of his brother ***was*** Jubal; he was the father of everyone handling lyre and pipe. And Zillah, she also bore Tubal-cain, a sharpener of every cutter of bronze and iron; and the sister of Tubal-cain ***was*** Naamah. And Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; wives of Lamech, give ear to my word: for a man I have killed for my bruise, and a young man for my wound. For sevenfold Cain shall be avenged, and Lamech seventy and seven ***times***." And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, "for God has appointed for me another seed in place of Abel, because Cain killed him." And to Seth, to him also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. Then calling on the name of the LORD was begun.

Chapter 4 Preview

Outside the garden, life goes on. Adam and Eve have children, and the first two brothers in history grow up to be a farmer and a shepherd. Both bring offerings to the LORD, but God accepts Abel's

and not Cain's. Cain grows angry. God warns him that sin is crouching at his door, ready to pounce, but Cain will not listen. He kills his brother in the field.

Sin spreads fast. In one generation it goes from eating forbidden fruit to murder. The rest of the chapter traces Cain's family line, a clever and gifted people who build cities and invent tools and music, but who drift further from God, ending with a boastful killer named Lamech. Then God gives Adam and Eve another son, Seth, and the chapter closes with a quiet line full of hope: people began to call on the name of the LORD.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1-2 *And the man knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and she said, "I have acquired a man with the LORD." And again she bore his brother, Abel. And Abel was a shepherd of a flock, and Cain was a worker of **the** ground.*

"And the man knew Eve his wife" is the Bible's modest way of describing marriage intimacy. Eve gave birth to Cain and said, "I have acquired a man with the LORD." Her words show faith. She knew life came from God. Some Bible teachers think she hoped Cain might be the promised Seed of 3:15 who would crush the serpent. If so, she was about to learn painfully that he was not.

Then came Abel. His name means breath or vapor, something that passes quickly. It turned out to fit his short life. Abel kept flocks and Cain farmed the ground. Both jobs were honorable. Adam had been told to work the ground (3:23), and animals were needed for wool and skins. Nothing in the text suggests one job was holier than the other.

4:3-5 *And it came about at the end of days, and Cain brought from the fruit of the ground an offering to the LORD. And Abel, he also brought from the firstborn of his flock and from their fat. And the LORD looked to Abel and to his offering, and to Cain and to his offering He did not look. And Cain burned **with anger** exceedingly, and his face fell.*

"At the end of days," both brothers brought an offering to the LORD. Cain brought "from the fruit of the ground." Abel brought "from the firstborn of his flock and from their fat." The firstborn came first, and the fat was the choicest part. Abel gave God his best and gave it first.

"The LORD looked to Abel and to his offering," but not for Cain and his. Why? Some point out that Abel's offering involved blood, like the garments of skin in 3:21. The New Testament puts the emphasis on the heart. Hebrews 11:4 says Abel offered "by faith," and 1 John 3:12 says Cain's deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous. God looked at the worshiper before He looked at the gift. Cain went through the motions. Abel trusted God and gave Him his best.

Cain's response revealed his heart: he "burned with anger exceedingly, and his face fell." He sulked. If his heart had been right, he would have asked God what he did wrong.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:4 (alluded to)

4:6-7 *And the LORD said to Cain, "Why do you burn **with anger**, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, **is there** not a lifting up? And if you do not do well, sin **is** crouching at the door; and to you **is** its desire, and you shall rule over it."*

God did not ignore Cain. He came to him with questions, just as He came to Adam in 3:9: "Why do you burn with anger?" God was giving Cain a way back. "If you do well, is there not a lifting up?" It was not too late. Cain could still turn around and be accepted.

Then a vivid warning: "sin is crouching at the door; and to you is its desire, and you shall rule over it." Sin is pictured like a wild animal waiting to spring. The word "desire" is the same word used in 3:16. Sin wants to control us. But God tells Cain he can and must rule over it.

That is a word for every one of us. Anger by itself can be a warning light, but if we feed it, it becomes the door sin uses to come in. Jesus taught that anger in the heart is the root of murder (Matthew 5:21-22). Deal with it while it is still at the door.

4:8 *And Cain said to Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, and Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.*

Cain did not rule over sin. Sin ruled over him. "Cain said to Abel his brother" something, and when they were in the field, alone, "Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him." The word "brother" shows up again and again in this chapter. Moses keeps reminding us who Abel was to Cain.

The first human death was a murder, one brother killing another. Adam and Eve had to bury their son. Sin never stays small. In one generation it went from a bite of fruit to bloodshed. John uses Cain as a warning: we should not be like him, who was of the evil one and killed his brother because his own deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous (1 John 3:12). Jesus spoke of "Abel the righteous" (Matthew 23:35). Abel became the first martyr, killed because he was right with God.

New Testament links: Matthew 23:35 (alluded to); Jude 1:11 (alluded to); 1 John 3:12 (alluded to); Luke 11:51 (alluded to)

4:9-12 *And the LORD said to Cain, "Where **is** Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. **Am** I my brother's keeper?" And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood **is** crying out to Me from the ground. And now you **are** cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer give its strength to you; a wanderer and a fugitive you shall be on the earth."*

"Where is Abel your brother?" Once again God asks a question He knows the answer to, giving Cain a chance to confess. Cain answered with a lie and a sneer: "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" The honest answer was yes. God made us responsible to love and care for one another (Galatians 6:2).

"The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to Me from the ground." Cain thought no one saw. God did. Innocent blood cries out to God for justice. Hebrews 12:24 says the blood of Jesus "speaks

better things than that of Abel." Abel's blood cried for justice. Jesus' blood speaks of mercy and forgiveness for all who come to Him.

Adam's sin brought a curse on the ground. Cain himself is now "cursed from the ground." The ground that soaked up his brother's blood would no longer give him its strength. The farmer who gave God a careless offering would no longer be able to farm. God told him, "a wanderer and a fugitive you shall be on the earth."

New Testament links: Hebrews 12:24 (alluded to); Luke 11:51 (alluded to)

4:13-15 *And Cain said to the LORD, "My iniquity **is** too great to bear. Look, You have driven me today from the face of the ground, and from Your face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a wanderer and a fugitive on the earth, and it will be **that** everyone who finds me will kill me." And the LORD said to him, "Therefore, anyone who kills Cain, sevenfold he shall be avenged." And the LORD put a sign for Cain, so that anyone who found him would not strike him.*

Cain's reply sounds like sorrow, but it is not repentance: "My iniquity is too great to bear." The Hebrew word can mean the sin itself or the punishment it brings, and the rest of his words show which one weighed on him. He was sorry about the consequences, not about what he had done to his brother or to God. He worried about himself: "everyone who finds me will kill me."

Who would kill him? Adam and Eve had other sons and daughters (5:4), and Cain lived a long time. In time there would be many relatives who might want to avenge Abel's death.

Even so, God showed mercy to a murderer. He promised that anyone who killed Cain would face God's vengeance "sevenfold," and He gave Cain "a sign" to protect him. We aren't told what the sign was, and guesses are only guesses. The point is that God, not man, would deal with Cain. God is just, but He is also patient, even with those who don't deserve it.

4:16-18 *And Cain went out from before the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he was building a city, and he called the name of the city according to the name of his son, Enoch. And to Enoch was born Irad; and Irad fathered Mehujael; and Mehujael fathered Methushael; and Methushael fathered Lamech.*

"Cain went out from before the LORD." He settled in "the land of Nod," a name that means wandering. Even when he settled down, he was still a wanderer at heart.

"Cain knew his wife." People often ask where she came from. The answer is simple: Adam "fathered sons and daughters" (5:4). Cain must have married a sister or a niece. That sounds strange to us, but God's laws against marrying close relatives came much later, in the time of Moses (Leviticus 18:9). In the earliest generations it was the only way the human race could grow. Many Bible teachers also suggest that, so close to creation, the human family did not yet carry the inherited weaknesses that make such marriages harmful today.

Cain "was building a city" and named it after his son Enoch. He refused to be a wanderer on God's terms, so he built security for himself. A list of his descendants follows, down to Lamech.

4:19-22 *And Lamech took for himself two wives; the name of the one **was** Adah, and the name of the second **was** Zillah. And Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of dwellers **in** tents and **with** herds. And the name of his brother **was** Jubal; he was the father of everyone handling lyre and pipe. And Zillah, she also bore Tubal-cain, a sharpener of every cutter of bronze and iron; and the sister of Tubal-cain **was** Naamah.*

Lamech is the first man in the Bible who "took for himself two wives." God's pattern was one man and one woman (2:24). Scripture records polygamy honestly, but it never presents it as God's ideal, and Genesis will show again and again the pain it caused.

Cain's line was full of talent. Jabal was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. Jubal was the father of "everyone handling lyre and pipe," the first musicians. Tubal-cain was "a sharpener of every cutter of bronze and iron," a metalworker. These are good gifts. Music, farming and craftsmanship are all part of God's creation mandate in 1:28, and Christians can enjoy them and use them for God's glory. But Cain's line built a culture without God. A society can be clever, creative and successful, and still be lost.

4:23-24 *And Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; wives of Lamech, give ear to my word: for a man I have killed for my bruise, and a young man for my wound. For sevenfold Cain shall be avenged, and Lamech seventy and seven **times**."*

Lamech's speech is a poem, and it is a song of revenge. "for a man I have killed for my bruise, and a young man for my wound." He brags to his wives that he takes far more revenge than the wrong done to him. God had promised to avenge Cain sevenfold. Lamech says, "Lamech seventy and seven times." He did not need God. He would take care of himself.

By the seventh generation from Adam, Cain's line had gone from murder in secret to murder in song. The world was getting darker. Compare Jesus' words in Matthew 18:22, where Peter asks how many times he should forgive, and Jesus answers, "up to seventy times seven." Lamech wanted unlimited revenge. Jesus calls us to unlimited forgiveness. Paul tells us to leave room for God's wrath and never take our own revenge (Romans 12:19).

New Testament links: Matthew 18:22 (alluded to)

4:25-26 *And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, "for God has appointed for me another seed in place of Abel, because Cain killed him." And to Seth, to him also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. Then calling on the name of the LORD was begun.*

The chapter does not end with Lamech. "Adam knew his wife again," and Eve gave birth to a son she named Seth, saying, "God has appointed for me another seed in place of Abel." The name Seth is linked to a Hebrew word meaning appointed. Through Seth, God would keep the line of the promised Seed going. Luke traces the family line of Jesus back through Seth to Adam (Luke 3:38).

Seth had a son named Enosh. "Then calling on the name of the LORD was begun." While Cain's family built cities and sang about revenge, Seth's family prayed and worshiped. To call on the name of the LORD means to pray to Him, trust Him and worship Him publicly. Paul quotes the

prophet Joel to say that whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13). That has been the way of salvation from the beginning.

Chapter 4 Summary

Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain the farmer and Abel the shepherd. Both brought offerings, and the LORD accepted Abel, who gave his best by faith, but not Cain. Cain grew angry, and God warned him that sin was crouching at his door and that he must rule over it. Instead, Cain killed his brother in the field. When God asked where Abel was, Cain lied and asked whether he was his brother's keeper. God told him Abel's blood cried out from the ground, cursed him to be a wanderer, and still put a sign on him to protect him. Cain went out from God's presence, married, built a city, and his descendants became herdsmen, musicians and metalworkers. His descendant Lamech took two wives and boasted of murder and revenge. Then God gave Adam and Eve another son, Seth, and in the days of Seth's son Enosh, people began to call on the name of the LORD.

People and Places

- Cain: Adam and Eve's firstborn son, a farmer, who killed his brother.
- Abel: Adam and Eve's second son, a shepherd, who offered by faith.
- Nod: the land east of Eden where Cain settled; the name means wandering.
- Enoch (son of Cain): Cain's son, and the name of the city Cain built. Not the same man as the Enoch of 5:21-24.
- Lamech (son of Methushael): a descendant of Cain who took two wives and boasted of killing. Not the same man as Noah's father in 5:28-29.
- Seth: the son God gave Adam and Eve after Abel's death; the ancestor of Noah and of Jesus.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. What did Cain and Abel each bring to the LORD? (4:3-4)

2. According to Hebrews 11:4 and 1 John 3:12, why was Abel's offering accepted and Cain's not?

3. What did God warn Cain about before he killed his brother? (4:7)

4. How did Cain answer when God asked where Abel was? (4:9)

5. Abel's blood cried out for justice, but Hebrews 12:24 says Jesus' blood speaks better (4:10). What does the blood of Jesus say to you?

6. God protected Cain even after the murder (4:15). What does that show about God's patience, and how does it challenge the way we think about people who have done great wrong?

7. What gifts and skills came from Cain's descendants, and what was missing from their lives? (4:20-22)

8. How was Lamech's attitude toward revenge different from what Jesus teaches about forgiveness? (4:23-24; Matthew 18:22)

9. Is there anger "crouching at the door" in your life right now? What would it look like to rule over it before it rules over you?

10. Cain asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Who has God placed in your life to watch out for and care for?

Chapter 5: From Adam to Noah

Scripture

5:1-20 This ***is*** the book of the generations of Adam. In the day God created mankind, in the likeness of God He made him. Male and female He created them, and He blessed them and called their name Mankind in the day they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and he fathered ***a son*** in his likeness, according to his image, and he called his name Seth. And the days of Adam after he fathered Seth were eight hundred years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Adam which he lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died. And Seth lived one hundred and five years, and he fathered Enosh. And Seth lived after he fathered Enosh eight hundred and seven years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died. And Enosh lived ninety years, and he fathered Kenan. And Enosh lived after he fathered Kenan eight hundred and fifteen years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years, and he died. And Kenan lived seventy years, and he fathered Mahalalel. And Kenan lived after he fathered Mahalalel eight hundred and forty years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years, and he died. And Mahalalel lived sixty-five years, and he fathered Jared. And Mahalalel lived after he fathered Jared eight hundred and thirty years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years, and he died. And Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years, and he fathered Enoch. And Jared lived after he fathered Enoch eight hundred years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years, and he died.

5:21-32 And Enoch lived sixty-five years, and he fathered Methuselah. And Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah three hundred years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God, and he ***was*** not, for God took him. And Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years, and he fathered Lamech. And Methuselah lived after he fathered Lamech seven hundred and eighty-two years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and he died. And Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and he fathered a son. And he called his name Noah, saying, "This ***one*** shall comfort us from our work and from the pain of our hands, from the ground which the LORD has cursed." And Lamech lived after he fathered Noah five hundred and ninety-five years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years, and he died. And Noah was a son of five hundred years, and Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Chapter 5 Preview

Chapter 4 traces the line of Cain. Chapter 5 traces the line of Seth, the family through whom God will keep His promise of a Savior. It is a genealogy, a family record, and it moves in a steady rhythm: a man lived so many years, became the father of a son, lived more years, had other sons and daughters, and then the same three words, "and he died."

Ten generations pass from Adam to Noah. The ages are long, many of them over nine hundred years. But one man breaks the pattern. Enoch walks with God, and he does not die, because God takes him. The chapter ends with Noah, whose father hopes he will bring rest from the curse, and with his three sons, who are about to become the fathers of every nation on earth.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1-2 *This **is** the book of the generations of Adam. In the day God created mankind, in the likeness of God He made him. Male and female He created them, and He blessed them and called their name Mankind in the day they were created.*

"This is the book of the generations of Adam." Genesis is built around these "generations" headings (2:4). A new section begins here, and it starts by looking back to creation. "In the likeness of God He made him." He created them "male and female," blessed them, and "called their name Mankind." The Hebrew word is adam, the name of the first man and the word for mankind.

Moses reminds us of where we came from before he lists a single name. Every person in this chapter, and every person who has ever lived, carries the image of God. Genealogies can feel dry, but this one is a list of real people God made and knew by name.

New Testament links: James 3:9 (alluded to)

5:3-5 *And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and he fathered **a son** in his likeness, according to his image, and he called his name Seth. And the days of Adam after he fathered Seth were eight hundred years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Adam which he lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.*

Adam "fathered a son in his likeness, according to his image, and he called his name Seth." The wording deliberately echoes verse 1. Adam was made in God's likeness. Seth was born in Adam's likeness. That means Seth carried God's image, but he also inherited Adam's fallen nature. Every child since then has been born that way (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12).

Adam lived 930 years "and he died." God's warning in 2:17 came true. It took more than nine centuries, but death came, just as God said. The serpent had said, "You shall not surely die" (3:4). Every "and he died" in this chapter shows who was telling the truth.

New Testament links: Romans 5:14 (pictured); Luke 3:36-38 (alluded to)

5:6-20 *And Seth lived one hundred and five years, and he fathered Enosh. And Seth lived after he fathered Enosh eight hundred and seven years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died. And Enosh lived ninety years, and he fathered Kenan. And Enosh lived after he fathered Kenan eight hundred and fifteen years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years, and he died. And Kenan lived seventy years, and he fathered Mahalalel. And Kenan lived after he fathered Mahalalel eight hundred and forty years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years, and he died. And Mahalalel lived sixty-five years, and he fathered Jared. And Mahalalel lived after he fathered Jared eight hundred and thirty years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years, and he died. And Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years, and he fathered Enoch. And Jared lived after he fathered Enoch eight hundred years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years, and he died.*

The list rolls on: Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared. Each one lived hundreds of years, had a son, "fathered sons and daughters," and died. Luke lists the same names in the family line of Jesus (Luke 3:36-38). These were real men.

Why did people live so long? We aren't told. Some Bible teachers suggest the world before the flood was different in ways that allowed longer life, and that the human body, so close to creation, was not yet worn down by generations of sin and disease. After the flood, ages drop steadily, and by Moses' time a long life was seventy or eighty years (Psalm 90:10). I take the ages as written. They are given with plain numbers, like the rest of the chapter.

With such long lives, the world filled up quickly. "He fathered sons and daughters" appears over and over, so by Noah's day the population was likely very large. Adam lived long enough to know Lamech, Noah's father. Imagine hearing about Eden from the man who walked there.

New Testament links: Luke 3:36-38 (alluded to)

5:21-24 *And Enoch lived sixty-five years, and he fathered Methuselah. And Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah three hundred years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God, and he **was** not, for God took him.*

Enoch breaks the pattern. At sixty-five he became the father of Methuselah, and then "Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah three hundred years." Something changed in his life around the birth of his son. Genesis is silent on what it was, but from then on he walked with God.

To walk with God means to live in close, daily fellowship with Him, agreeing with Him and going His way (Amos 3:3). It is not a single moment. It is three hundred years of ordinary days. And Enoch did it while raising a family, "and he fathered sons and daughters." Walking with God is for parents, workers and ordinary people, not only for monks and preachers.

"And he was not, for God took him." There is no "and he died" for Enoch. Hebrews 11:5 says he was taken up so that he would not see death, and that before he was taken he pleased God. The next verse says that without faith it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6). Jude 14 says Enoch, "the seventh from Adam," prophesied about the Lord coming with His holy ones to judge the ungodly. In a world where death reigned, Enoch was a sign that death would not have the last word. Many Bible teachers, and I am one of them, also see in Enoch a picture of the rapture of the church: he was taken up before the judgment of the flood fell, while Noah was carried safely through it. In the same way, I believe Christ will take His church to be with Him before the Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:5 (alluded to); Luke 3:36-38 (alluded to)

5:25-27 *And Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years, and he fathered Lamech. And Methuselah lived after he fathered Lamech seven hundred and eighty-two years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and he died.*

"All the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years," the longest life recorded in the Bible. If you add up the numbers, Methuselah died in the very year the flood came. He was 187 when Lamech was born (5:25), Lamech was 182 when Noah was born (5:28), and Noah was 600 when the flood came (7:6). 187 + 182 + 600 = 969, Methuselah's age when he died. Many have seen in that God's patience. He let the oldest man on earth live as long as he did before judgment fell. Peter later wrote that the Lord is patient, not wanting anyone to perish but all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Even so, Methuselah died. Living a long time is not the same as living well. Enoch lived 365 years on earth and walked with God. His son lived nearly three times as long, and Scripture says nothing more about him than that he had children and died. What will be said of your life?

New Testament links: Luke 3:36-38 (alluded to)

5:28-31 *And Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and he fathered a son. And he called his name Noah, saying, "This **one** shall comfort us from our work and from the pain of our hands, from the ground which the LORD has cursed." And Lamech lived after he fathered Noah five hundred and ninety-five years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years, and he died.*

Lamech, the son of Methuselah, named his son Noah, saying, "This one shall comfort us from our work and from the pain of our hands." The name Noah is close to the Hebrew word for rest or comfort. Lamech knew the ground was cursed (3:17) and felt the weight of toil. He longed for relief.

He is a different Lamech from the boastful killer in Cain's line (4:19-24). One Lamech sang about revenge. This Lamech hoped in the LORD. Two men with the same name, from two families going in two directions.

Noah would not end the curse. Only Jesus will do that (Revelation 22:3). But through Noah, God would preserve the human race and give the world a fresh start. Every longing for rest points beyond Noah to Jesus, who said, "Come to Me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

New Testament links: Luke 3:36-38 (alluded to)

5:32 *And Noah was a son of five hundred years, and Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth.*

"Noah was a son of five hundred years, and Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth." The chapter ends here without the usual "and he died." Noah's story is not finished. It will fill the next four chapters.

Shem, Ham and Japheth will matter a great deal. After the flood, all the nations of the earth will come from these three men (10:32). Shem is named first, and through Shem will come Abraham, Israel and, in time, the Messiah. Messiah means Anointed One. It is the Hebrew form of the title Christ, and it points to the promised King and Savior. God is quietly keeping track of the line of promise, one generation at a time.

New Testament links: Luke 3:36-38 (alluded to)

Chapter 5 Summary

Chapter 5 records the line of Adam through Seth down to Noah, ten generations in all. It opens by reminding us that God made mankind in His likeness, male and female. Adam had Seth in his own likeness and lived 930 years, and then he died, just as God had warned. The same pattern repeats with each man in the line: long lives, sons and daughters, and death. Enoch broke the pattern. He walked with God for three hundred years, and God took him so that he did not see death. Methuselah lived 969 years, the longest life recorded. Lamech named his son Noah, hoping he would bring rest from the cursed ground. The chapter ends with Noah, at five hundred years old, becoming the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth.

People and Places

- Enoch (son of Jared): the seventh from Adam, who walked with God and was taken without dying. Not the same man as Cain's son in 4:17.
- Methuselah: Enoch's son, who lived 969 years, the longest life in the Bible.
- Lamech (son of Methuselah): Noah's father, who hoped Noah would bring rest. Not the same man as Cain's descendant in 4:18-24.
- Noah: the son of Lamech, through whom God preserved the human race in the flood.
- Shem, Ham and Japheth: Noah's three sons, the ancestors of all the nations after the flood.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. How does chapter 5 begin, and why do you think it looks back to creation? (5:1-2)

2. In whose likeness was Seth born, and what does that mean for us? (5:3)

3. What three words keep repeating through this chapter, and what do they prove about God's word in 2:17?

4. Adam lived long enough to know Lamech, Noah's father (5:5). Who passed the faith on to you, and who are you passing it on to?

5. What does it mean that Enoch "walked with God"? (5:22, 24)

6. What happened to Enoch, and how does Hebrews 11:5-6 explain it?

7. Methuselah lived longer than anyone, yet Genesis says little more than that he had children and died (5:27). What is the difference between living long and living well?

8. Why did Lamech name his son Noah, and who brings the true rest he longed for? (5:29; Matthew 11:28)

9. Enoch walked with God while raising a family and living an ordinary life. What would walking with God look like in your ordinary days this week?

10. If someone wrote one line about your life, what would you want it to say?

Chapter 6: Corruption and the Ark

Scripture

6:1-8 And it came about, when mankind began to become many on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, and the sons of God saw the daughters of mankind, that they ***were*** good, and they took for themselves wives from all whom they chose. And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not remain in mankind forever, in that he also ***is*** flesh; and his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God went in to the daughters of mankind and they bore ***children*** to them. Those ***were*** the mighty ***men*** who ***were*** from long ago, the men of renown. And the LORD saw that the evil of mankind ***was*** great on the earth, and every inclination of the thoughts of his heart ***was*** only evil all the day. And the LORD regretted that He had made mankind on the earth, and He was pained to His heart. And the LORD said, "I will wipe out mankind whom I created from the face of the ground, from mankind to livestock to moving things and to the flying things of the heavens; for I regret that I made them." And Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

6:9-22 These ***are*** the generations of Noah. Noah ***was*** a righteous man; blameless he was in his generations; with God Noah walked. And Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled ***with*** violence. And God saw the earth, and look, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its way on the earth. And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is full ***of*** violence because of them; and look, I am about to destroy them with the earth. Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; ***with*** compartments you shall make the ark, and you shall cover it inside and outside with pitch. And this ***is*** how you shall make it: the length of the ark approximately 450 feet (three hundred cubits), its breadth approximately 75 feet (fifty cubits), and its height approximately 45 feet (thirty cubits). You shall make a roof for the ark, and to approximately 18 inches (a cubit) you shall finish it from above; and the entrance of the ark you shall put in its side; ***with*** lower, second, and third ***decks*** you shall make it. And I, look, I am about to bring the flood ***of*** waters on the earth to destroy all flesh in which ***is*** the breath of life from under the heavens; everything that ***is*** on the earth shall perish. And I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark, you and your sons and your wife and the wives of your sons with you. And of every living thing, of all flesh, two of every ***kind*** you shall bring into the ark to keep ***them*** alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the flying things according to their kind, and of the livestock according to their kind, of every moving thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every ***kind*** shall come to you to keep ***them*** alive. And you, take for yourself from all food that is eaten, and you shall gather ***it*** to yourself; and it shall be for you and for them for food." And Noah did according to all that God commanded him; so he did.

Chapter 6 Preview

By chapter 6 the human race has multiplied, and so has sin. The chapter opens with a strange and much-debated scene: the sons of God take wives from the daughters of men, and the Nephilim are on the earth. Then God gives His verdict on the whole world. Every inclination of man's heart is

only evil all the day, and the earth is filled with violence. The LORD is grieved in His heart, and He decides to wipe out the world He has made.

But Noah finds favor in the eyes of the LORD. In the middle of a corrupt generation, one man walks with God. God tells Noah what is coming and gives him exact instructions for building an ark, a huge wooden vessel to save his family and the animals. God promises to make a covenant with him. And Noah does everything God commands.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1-2 *And it came about, when mankind began to become many on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, and the sons of God saw the daughters of mankind, that they **were** good, and they took for themselves wives from all whom they chose.*

As people multiplied, "the sons of God saw the daughters of mankind, that they were good, and they took for themselves wives from all whom they chose." Who were "the sons of God"? Bible-believing Christians have held two main views, and both deserve a fair hearing.

The first view says they were fallen angels. In Job 1:6 and 2:1 "the sons of God" clearly means angels. Jude 6-7 speaks of angels who left their proper home and links them with sexual sin, and 2 Peter 2:4-5 mentions angels who sinned right before mentioning Noah's flood. Many in the early church held this view.

The second view says they were men from the godly line of Seth, who married women from the ungodly line of Cain. Those who hold this view point to Jesus' words that angels do not marry (Matthew 22:30), and to the fact that the judgment that follows falls on mankind, not on angels. In this view the sin was believers marrying unbelievers and giving up their faith. A third view, held by some, sees the "sons of God" as powerful rulers or kings who took any women they wanted.

I won't take a hard side on this question. Good Bible teachers disagree. What is clear in every view is that evil was crossing boundaries God had set, and they "took" whomever they "chose," following their own eyes, just as Eve did when she "saw" the fruit (3:6).

6:3 *And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not remain in mankind forever, in that he also **is** flesh; and his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."*

"My Spirit shall not remain in mankind forever." God's Spirit had been at work among people, pleading with them and restraining evil, but He would not stay with them forever. God's patience has a limit. "He also is flesh" means man is weak, his life is short, and he is bent toward sin.

"His days shall be one hundred and twenty years." There are two main readings. Some take it as a limit on the human lifespan, which does drop sharply after the flood. Many others take it as the time God gave before the flood would come, a final period of grace. I lean toward the second view, since people lived much longer than 120 years for several generations afterward (11:10-26). Either way, God was being patient. Peter says God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built (1 Peter 3:20).

6:4 *The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God went in to the daughters of mankind and they bore* ***children*** *to them. Those* ***were*** *the mighty* ***men*** *who* ***were*** *from long ago, the men of renown.*

"The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward." The word Nephilim may come from a Hebrew word meaning to fall, and older translations called them giants. The only other place they appear is Numbers 13:33, where Israel's spies said they saw the Nephilim in Canaan and felt like grasshoppers next to them.

Were the Nephilim the children of the sons of God and daughters of men? The verse can be read that way, and those who hold the angel view usually read it so. Others say the Nephilim were simply on the earth at that time, powerful violent men, and the verse is only telling us the setting. The text doesn't settle it. What it does say is that these "mighty men who were from long ago, the men of renown" were famous in the world's eyes. The world celebrated them. God was about to judge them.

6:5 *And the LORD saw that the evil of mankind* ***was*** *great on the earth, and every inclination of the thoughts of his heart* ***was*** *only evil all the day.*

"The LORD saw." He sees everything. And what He saw was that "the evil of mankind was great on the earth." Then He goes deeper than actions: "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the day."

Each word piles up. "Every" inclination. "Only" evil. "All the day," all the time. The problem went deeper than bad behavior, all the way down to bad hearts. Jeremiah would later write that the heart is more deceitful than all else and desperately sick (Jeremiah 17:9). Jesus taught that evil thoughts, murders and every other sin come from the heart (Matthew 15:19).

That is why the answer to sin can never be just better rules or better surroundings. We need new hearts, and only God can give them (Ezekiel 36:26).

6:6-7 *And the LORD regretted that He had made mankind on the earth, and He was pained to His heart. And the LORD said, "I will wipe out mankind whom I created from the face of the ground, from mankind to livestock to moving things and to the flying things of the heavens; for I regret that I made them."*

"The LORD regretted that He had made mankind." Does that mean God made a mistake or changed His mind? No. Numbers 23:19 says God is not a man that He should repent. God knew from the beginning what would happen. These words show us His heart. "He was pained to His heart." God is not cold or distant. Sin wounds Him. Paul tells believers not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). Our sin still grieves Him today.

"I will wipe out mankind." God's grief led to judgment. A holy God cannot let evil go on forever. The animals would be destroyed along with man, because man was the head of creation, and when the head fell, everything under him suffered.

6:8 *And Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.*

"And Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD." Here is the first time the word favor, often translated grace, appears in the Bible. Everything changes again with one man: Noah. The whole world was headed for judgment, but God showed grace to one man.

Did Noah earn God's favor by being good? The order of the text matters. First Noah "found favor" (6:8), then we read that he was righteous (6:9). Grace comes first. Hebrews 11:7 says Noah became "heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." Noah was saved the same way we are: by grace, through faith (Ephesians 2:8).

6:9-10 *These **are** the generations of Noah. Noah **was** a righteous man; blameless he was in his generations; with God Noah walked. And Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.*

"These are the generations of Noah." A new section of Genesis begins. Noah is described three ways. He was "a righteous man," right with God. "Blameless he was in his generations," which doesn't mean sinless, as chapter 9 will show, but means that no one could rightly point a finger at the way he lived. And "with God Noah walked," the same words used of Enoch (5:24).

"In his generations" is worth thinking about. Noah lived in a deeply wicked generation, and he still walked with God. You can't blame your surroundings for your choices. Noah stood alone, and he stood firm.

6:11-13 *And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled **with** violence. And God saw the earth, and look, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its way on the earth. And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is full **of** violence because of them; and look, I am about to destroy them with the earth.*

The world was "corrupt" and "full of violence." The word corrupt means ruined or spoiled, like a rotten piece of fruit. The same Hebrew word appears in verse 13, where God says He is about to "destroy" them. Man had already ruined the earth by sin. God's judgment would bring that ruin to its end.

"All flesh had corrupted its way on the earth." Then God told Noah plainly what He was going to do. God does not usually hide His plans from those who walk with Him (Amos 3:7). Noah knew what was coming long before anyone else, and he had to live with that knowledge, preaching to a world that would not listen. Peter calls him a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5).

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:7 (alluded to)

6:14-16 *Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; **with** compartments you shall make the ark, and you shall cover it inside and outside with pitch. And this **is** how you shall make it: the length of the ark approximately 450 feet (three hundred cubits), its breadth approximately 75 feet (fifty cubits), and its height approximately 45 feet (thirty cubits). You shall make a roof for the ark, and to approximately 18 inches (a cubit) you shall finish it from above; and the entrance of the ark you shall put in its side; **with** lower, second, and third **decks** you shall make it.*

God gave Noah detailed instructions. The ark was to be made of "gopher wood," a kind of wood no one can identify with certainty today. Some suggest a resinous wood like cypress. It would have rooms and be covered "inside and outside with pitch," a tar-like coating to make it waterproof. The Hebrew word for "cover" is related to the word later used for atonement, which means covering sin. Many Bible teachers have seen a picture there.

A cubit was the length from a man's elbow to the tip of his fingers, about eighteen inches. That makes the ark about 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high, with three decks. It was not a small boat. Its shape was like a long box, built to float and stay stable, not to sail anywhere. In the early 1990s a team of Korean ship researchers studied the ark's proportions and argued that a box of that shape would be very stable in rough water.

The ark had one door. There was one way in. Jesus said, "I am the door. If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved" (John 10:9).

6:17 *And I, look, I am about to bring the flood **of** waters on the earth to destroy all flesh in which **is** the breath of life from under the heavens; everything that **is** on the earth shall perish.*

"I, look, I am about to bring the flood of waters on the earth." God Himself would bring it. The flood was God's deliberate judgment on sin, not a natural accident. Its reach was total: "everything that is on the earth shall perish."

That should sober us. God is patient, but He does judge. Jesus pointed to the flood as a warning of the judgment that will come when He returns (Matthew 24:37-39). People in Noah's day went on with ordinary life, eating, drinking and marrying, right up until the day the flood came. The same will be true at His coming. The time to get into the ark is before the rain starts.

6:18 *And I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark, you and your sons and your wife and the wives of your sons with you.*

"And I will establish My covenant with you." Here is the first time the word covenant appears in the Bible. A covenant is a solemn, binding agreement. When God makes a covenant, He binds Himself by His own word to do what He has promised. God would keep Noah and his family alive through the judgment. The covenant itself will be spelled out after the flood in chapter 9.

Noah's whole family was included: "you and your sons and your wife and the wives of your sons with you." God's grace to Noah reached his household. Noah's faith mattered for the people under his roof. Parents, your walk with God matters for your children.

6:19-21 *And of every living thing, of all flesh, two of every **kind** you shall bring into the ark to keep **them** alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the flying things according to their kind, and of the livestock according to their kind, of every moving thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every **kind** shall come to you to keep **them** alive. And you, take for yourself from all food that is eaten, and you shall gather **it** to yourself; and it shall be for you and for them for food."*

Noah was to bring "two of every kind" of animal, male and female, to keep them alive. Chapter 7 adds that clean animals went in by sevens (7:2). The word "kind" echoes chapter 1. Many who hold to a worldwide flood believe Noah did not need every variety of dog or cat on the ark, only representatives of each "kind," and that much of the variety we see today came later.

"Two of every kind shall come to you to keep them alive." Noah didn't have to hunt the animals down. God brought them. Noah's job was to build, gather food, and obey. God took care of what Noah could not do.

6:22 *And Noah did according to all that God commanded him; so he did.*

"And Noah did according to all that God commanded him." The verse leaves no room for half obedience. Building the ark must have taken many years. There was no sign of rain, and the neighbors very likely mocked him. Noah did not do part of what God said, or what made sense to him. He did all of it.

Hebrews 11:7 says Noah acted "by faith," warned about "things not yet seen." Faith takes God at His word before there is any proof, and then it gets to work. Noah's obedience did not save him. God's grace did. But his obedience showed that his faith was real.

Chapter 6 Summary

As people multiplied, the sons of God took wives from the daughters of men, and the Nephilim were on the earth; Bible teachers disagree on who these sons of God were. God said His Spirit would not remain in man forever and set a limit of 120 years. The LORD saw that every inclination of man's heart was only evil all the day, and He was grieved and decided to wipe out mankind. But Noah found favor in His eyes. Noah was righteous and blameless in his time and walked with God, while the earth was corrupt and full of violence. God told Noah He would destroy all flesh by a flood and commanded him to build an ark of gopher wood, giving him its exact size. God promised to establish His covenant with Noah, and told him to bring his family, two of every kind of animal, and food. Noah did all that God commanded.

People and Places

- Sons of God: a debated term; some believe they were fallen angels, others men from the line of Seth.
- Nephilim: a debated term for mighty, famous figures before the flood (6:4); also mentioned in Numbers 13:33.
- Ark: the large wooden vessel God told Noah to build to save his family and the animals.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. What are the main views about who "the sons of God" were? (6:2)

2. What did the LORD say about His Spirit and man in 6:3?

3. How does 6:5 describe the condition of the human heart?

4. The LORD was grieved in His heart over man's sin (6:6). How does it change the way you think about sin to know that it grieves God?

5. What was different about Noah, and which came first, God's favor or Noah's righteousness? (6:8-9)

6. The world celebrated its "men of renown," but God saw a world filled with violence (6:4, 11-13). Whom does our world celebrate today, and how might God see them?

7. What does the word covenant mean, and what did God promise Noah? (6:18)

8. How did Noah respond to God's instructions? (6:22; Hebrews 11:7)

9. Noah walked with God in a deeply wicked generation. What makes it hard to stand for God where you live and work, and how does Noah's example help?

10. Jesus compared the days of Noah to the days before His return (Matthew 24:37-39). How should that shape the way you live now?

Chapter 7: The Flood

Scripture

7:1-10 And the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen you ***to be*** righteous before Me in this generation. Of all the clean livestock you shall take for yourself seven ***by*** seven, a male and its female; and of the livestock that ***is*** not clean, two, a male and its female; also of the flying things of the heavens seven ***by*** seven, male and female, to keep seed alive on the face of all the earth. For in seven more days I am about to cause ***it*** to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe out every existing thing that I have made from the face of the ground." And Noah did according to all that the LORD commanded him. And Noah ***was*** a son of six hundred years, and the flood ***of*** waters was on the earth. And Noah went, and his sons and his wife and the wives of his sons with him, into the ark because of the waters of the flood. Of the clean livestock and of the livestock that ***is*** not clean, and of the flying things and of everything that moves on the ground, two ***by*** two they came to Noah into the ark, male and female, just as God had commanded Noah. And it came about after the seven days, and the waters of the flood were on the earth.

7:11-16 In the six hundredth year of the life of Noah, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on this day all the springs of ***the*** great deep were split open, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights. On this very day Noah went, and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and the wife of Noah and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark, they and every living thing according to its kind, and all the livestock according to its kind, and every moving thing that moves on the earth according to its kind, and every flying thing according to its kind, every bird, every wing. And they came to Noah into the ark, two ***by*** two of all flesh in which ***was*** the breath of life. And those that came, male and female of all flesh, came just as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut ***it*** behind him.

7:17-24 And the flood was forty days on the earth; and the waters multiplied and lifted up the ark, and it rose up off the earth. And the waters prevailed and multiplied exceedingly on the earth, and the ark went on the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly, exceedingly on the earth, and all the high mountains which ***were*** under all the heavens were covered. Approximately 22.5 feet (fifteen cubits) upward the waters prevailed, and the mountains were covered. And all flesh that moved on the earth perished, among the flying things and among the livestock and among the living things and among every swarming thing that swarms on the earth, and all mankind. Everything in whose nostrils ***was*** the breath of the spirit of life, of all that ***was*** on the dry ground, died. And He wiped out every existing thing that ***was*** on the face of the ground, from mankind to livestock to moving things and to the flying things of the heavens; and they were wiped out from the earth, and only Noah was left, and those who ***were*** with him in the ark. And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days.

Chapter 7 Preview

The ark is finished. God tells Noah to go in with his family and the animals, because in seven days the rain will begin. Noah obeys, the animals come, and the LORD Himself shuts the door behind them.

Then the flood comes. The fountains of the great deep burst open and the floodgates of the sky are opened. Rain falls for forty days and forty nights, and the water rises until it covers all the high mountains under the whole heaven. Every living thing on dry land dies. Only Noah is left, with those who are with him in the ark. The chapter is a sobering picture of God's judgment on sin, and an equally clear picture of His power to save those who take refuge in Him.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1 *And the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen you **to be** righteous before Me in this generation.*

"Go into the ark, you and all your household." The Hebrew word can also mean come, and older translations read it that way, as if God were inviting Noah to come in where He was. Either way, God was the one calling Noah to safety. Noah had built the ark, but he still waited for God to say the word.

God's reason: "for I have seen you to be righteous before Me in this generation." Out of the whole world, God saw one righteous man. Noah's family was brought in with him because of God's grace to Noah. That is a picture of how God works. One man's righteousness can bring blessing to many. In the fullest sense, that is what Jesus has done for all who belong to Him (Romans 5:19).

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:7 (alluded to)

7:2-4 *Of all the clean livestock you shall take for yourself seven **by** seven, a male and its female; and of the livestock that **is** not clean, two, a male and its female; also of the flying things of the heavens seven **by** seven, male and female, to keep seed alive on the face of all the earth. For in seven more days I am about to cause **it** to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe out every existing thing that I have made from the face of the ground."*

God now gives more detail than in 6:19. "Of all the clean livestock you shall take for yourself seven by seven, a male and its female," but of the unclean only "two, a male and its female." Clean animals were those God would later allow Israel to eat and to offer as sacrifices (Leviticus 11). Noah already knew the difference, long before Moses wrote it down. The extra clean animals would be needed for the sacrifice Noah offered after the flood (8:20) and for food (9:3). "Seven by seven" could mean seven pairs or seven animals, and Bible teachers take it both ways.

"In seven more days." Even with the ark finished, God gave one more week. It was one last week of mercy for anyone who would turn. Then: "rain on the earth forty days and forty nights." In the Bible, forty is often a number connected with testing and judgment: Israel in the wilderness forty years, Jesus tempted forty days.

7:5-9 *And Noah did according to all that the LORD commanded him. And Noah **was** a son of six hundred years, and the flood **of** waters was on the earth. And Noah went, and his sons and his wife and the wives of his sons with him, into the ark because of the waters of the flood. Of the clean livestock and of the livestock that **is** not clean, and of the flying things and of everything that moves on the ground, two **by** two they came to Noah into the ark, male and female, just as God had commanded Noah.*

"Noah did according to all that the LORD commanded him." Moses says it again, as in 6:22. Noah's obedience is the steady drumbeat of these chapters.

Noah was "a son of six hundred years," that is, six hundred years old. He had spent much of his life waiting and working for this moment. "Two by two they came to Noah into the ark, male and female, just as God had commanded Noah." Noah didn't need to round them up. God brought them to him. Picture the scene: animals of every kind walking into the ark. If the neighbors watched, even this did not move them to repent.

New Testament links: Luke 17:26-27 (alluded to); Matthew 24:37-38 (alluded to)

7:10-12 *And it came about after the seven days, and the waters of the flood were on the earth. In the six hundredth year of the life of Noah, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on this day all the springs of **the** great deep were split open, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights.*

"After the seven days," right on schedule, the flood began. Moses gives the exact date: "In the six hundredth year of the life of Noah, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month." That is the way a historian writes. Genesis presents this as something that really happened. Other ancient peoples of Mesopotamia also told stories of a great flood. Many Christians see these as distant memories of the real event that Genesis records truly.

Two sources of water came together. "All the springs of the great deep were split open," water from under the earth. And "the floodgates of the heavens were opened," water from above. On day two of creation God had separated the waters above from the waters below (1:6-7). Now, in judgment, He let them rush back together. It was as if creation itself were being undone, and the world returning to the watery state of 1:2.

New Testament links: 2 Peter 3:6 (alluded to)

7:13-16 *On this very day Noah went, and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and the wife of Noah and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark, they and every living thing according to its kind, and all the livestock according to its kind, and every moving thing that moves on the earth according to its kind, and every flying thing according to its kind, every bird, every wing. And they came to Noah into the ark, two* ***by*** *two of all flesh in which* ***was*** *the breath of life. And those that came, male and female of all flesh, came just as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut* ***it*** *behind him.*

"On this very day" Noah, his wife, his three sons and their three wives entered the ark. Eight people in all. Peter says that in the ark "few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water" (1 Peter 3:20). Out of the whole world, only eight.

Then a line worth reading slowly: "and the LORD shut it behind him." Noah did not shut the door. God did. Noah was safe because God shut him in, and the people outside were lost because God shut them out. Once the door was closed, it would not open again until the judgment was over.

Jesus told a parable about a door being shut and people outside knocking too late (Matthew 25:10-12). Today the door of salvation is open. Jesus is that door. But there will come a day when it closes. Now is the time to enter.

New Testament links: 1 Peter 3:20 (alluded to); 2 Peter 2:5 (alluded to)

7:17-18 *And the flood was forty days on the earth; and the waters multiplied and lifted up the ark, and it rose up off the earth. And the waters prevailed and multiplied exceedingly on the earth, and the ark went on the face of the waters.*

"The waters multiplied and lifted up the ark." The same water that brought death to the world lifted the ark to safety. The rain that was judgment for everyone else became the means of Noah's rescue. Peter compares the flood to baptism, which pictures our being saved through Christ's resurrection (1 Peter 3:20-21).

"The ark went on the face of the waters." The ark had no sail, no rudder and no oars. Noah couldn't steer it. He simply trusted the One who had told him to build it. When you are in Christ, you may not control where the waters carry you, but you are safe, because God has you.

7:19-20 *And the waters prevailed exceedingly, exceedingly on the earth, and all the high mountains which* ***were*** *under all the heavens were covered. Approximately 22.5 feet (fifteen cubits) upward the waters prevailed, and the mountains were covered.*

How big was the flood? "All the high mountains which were under all the heavens were covered." The water rose higher still: "Approximately 22.5 feet (fifteen cubits) upward the waters prevailed, and the mountains were covered." The phrase "under all the heavens" is strong language.

I believe the flood covered the whole earth, as the text plainly says. A local flood would not need an ark of that size. Noah could have simply moved his family and the animals somewhere else. Birds could have flown away. And God's promise in 9:11 never to flood the earth again would not

be true, since local floods have happened many times since. Peter says the world at that time was destroyed by water (2 Peter 3:6), and he puts it side by side with the coming judgment of the whole world by fire.

Some Christians hold that the flood was local, covering the whole world as Noah knew it, the region where people lived. They point out that Scripture sometimes uses "all the earth" or "under all the heavens" for a region (Deuteronomy 2:25; Genesis 41:57). I respect them. But here the text piles up every kind of universal language: all the high mountains, all flesh, every living thing, water fifteen cubits above the peaks, and more than a year in the ark. Together with God's promise in 9:11, that is why I believe this flood was worldwide, and that is how this study reads it.

New Testament links: 2 Peter 3:6 (alluded to)

7:21-23 *And all flesh that moved on the earth perished, among the flying things and among the livestock and among the living things and among every swarming thing that swarms on the earth, and all mankind. Everything in whose nostrils **was** the breath of the spirit of life, of all that **was** on the dry ground, died. And He wiped out every existing thing that **was** on the face of the ground, from mankind to livestock to moving things and to the flying things of the heavens; and they were wiped out from the earth, and only Noah was left, and those who **were** with him in the ark.*

"All flesh that moved on the earth perished." Moses lists them: "among the flying things and among the livestock and among the living things and among every swarming thing that swarms on the earth, and all mankind." Then he says it again: "Everything in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, of all that was on the dry ground, died." The breath of life that God breathed into man in 2:7 was taken back.

"And He wiped out every existing thing that was on the face of the ground." God did exactly what He said He would do in 6:7. He always does. The repetition in these verses is meant to make us feel the weight of it. These were real people who died, under the judgment of a holy God on a world that had rejected Him.

"Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark." Everyone outside the ark died. Everyone inside lived. It made no difference how good, strong or famous anyone outside was. The only question was whether they were in the ark. In the same way, the only question that matters for us is whether we are in Christ (Romans 8:1).

Many readers ask about the children who died in the flood. Genesis does not answer every question we have. We do know that the Judge of all the earth will do what is right (18:25), and that God cares even for those too young to know right from wrong (Jonah 4:11). We can trust Him with what He has not told us.

New Testament links: 2 Peter 2:5 (alluded to); 1 Peter 3:20 (alluded to); Luke 17:26-27 (alluded to)

7:24 *And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days.*

"The waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days." That is about five months. The rain stopped after forty days, but the water stayed. Noah and his family were shut in the ark for months with no land in sight.

Faith is not only for the moment we step through the door. It is also for the long days of waiting afterward. Noah had no idea when the water would go down. All he had was God's promise. The next chapter opens with the words "And God remembered Noah." He hadn't forgotten them for a moment.

Chapter 7 Summary

The LORD told Noah to enter the ark with his household, because He had seen Noah to be righteous. He was to take clean animals by sevens and unclean animals by twos, because in seven days God would send rain for forty days and nights. Noah obeyed. When he was six hundred years old, on a specific day, the fountains of the great deep burst open and the floodgates of the sky were opened. Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives entered the ark with the animals, and the LORD closed the door behind them. The waters rose and lifted the ark until all the high mountains under the heavens were covered. Every living thing on dry land died, and only Noah and those with him in the ark survived. The waters prevailed on the earth for 150 days.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. Why did God tell Noah to enter the ark? (7:1)

2. How many of the clean animals and the unclean animals were to go into the ark? (7:2-3)

3. Even with the ark finished, God gave one more week before the rain (7:4, 10). What does that tell you about His patience, and why do people still put off turning to Him?

4. What two sources of water came together in the flood? (7:11)

5. Who closed the door of the ark, and why does that matter? (7:16)

6. Why does this study read the flood as worldwide, and what do Christians who hold a local flood point to? (7:19-20)

7. Who survived the flood, and who did not? (7:21-23)

8. How long did the waters prevail on the earth? (7:24)

9. The only thing that mattered in the flood was whether a person was inside the ark. What does that teach us about being "in Christ"?

10. Noah waited many months with no land in sight. What are you waiting on God for right now, and how can you trust Him in the waiting?

Chapter 8: The Waters Recede

Scripture

8:1-14 And God remembered Noah and every living thing and all the livestock that ***were*** with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided. And the springs of ***the*** deep and the floodgates of the heavens were shut up, and the rain from the heavens was restrained. And the waters turned back from off the earth, going and turning back; and the waters decreased at the end of one hundred and fifty days. And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat. And the waters were going and decreasing until the tenth month; in the tenth ***month***, on the first of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen. And it came about at the end of forty days, and Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made. And he sent out the raven, and it went out, going out and returning, until the waters dried up from off the earth. And he sent out the dove from with him to see whether the waters had abated from off the face of the ground. And the dove did not find a resting place for the sole of its foot, and it returned to him into the ark, for water ***was*** on the face of all the earth; and he stretched out his hand and took it and brought it to him into the ark. And he waited yet another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark. And the dove came to him at the time of evening, and look, a freshly plucked olive leaf ***was*** in its mouth; and Noah knew that the waters had abated from off the earth. And he waited yet another seven days and sent out the dove, and it did not again return to him anymore. And it came about in the six hundred and first year, in the first ***month***, on the first of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and look, the face of the ground was dried up. And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

8:15-22 And God spoke to Noah, saying, "Go out from the ark, you and your wife and your sons and the wives of your sons with you. Every living thing that ***is*** with you of all flesh, among the flying things and among the livestock and among every moving thing that moves on the earth, bring out with you; and they shall swarm on the earth and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." And Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and the wives of his sons with him. Every living thing, every moving thing, and every flying thing, everything that moves on the earth, according to their families went out from the ark. And Noah built an altar to the LORD, and he took from all the clean livestock and from every clean flying thing, and he offered up burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to His heart, "I will not again curse the ground anymore because of mankind, for the inclination of the heart of mankind ***is*** evil from his youth; and I will not again strike down every living thing anymore, as I have done. All the days of the earth yet ***to come***, seed and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

Chapter 8 Preview

At the end of chapter 7, the whole earth lies under water, and the ark drifts alone. Chapter 8 opens with four words that turn the story: "And God remembered Noah." God sends a wind, shuts off the waters from above and below, and slowly the flood goes down. The ark comes to rest on the

mountains of Ararat. Noah sends out a raven and then a dove, until the dove comes back with a fresh olive leaf and finally does not come back at all.

After more than a year in the ark, God tells Noah to come out. The first thing Noah does on the new earth is build an altar and worship. God is pleased with his offering and promises never again to destroy every living thing as He has done. As long as the earth remains, the seasons will keep coming, a promise we still see every year.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1 *And God remembered Noah and every living thing and all the livestock that **were** with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided.*

"And God remembered Noah." When the Bible says God remembers, it doesn't mean He had forgotten. It means He acted on His promise. God remembered Hannah and gave her a son (1 Samuel 1:19). God remembered His covenant and rescued Israel from Egypt (Exodus 2:24). Here He remembered Noah, and He remembered the animals too. God cares about every creature He made (Psalm 36:6).

"God caused a wind to pass over the earth." In 1:2 the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. The Hebrew word for spirit and wind is the same. Now, as at creation, God sends His wind over the waters, and a new world begins to appear. Chapter 8 is like a second creation story. The same God who made the world in the beginning is making it new.

If you are in a season where God seems silent, this verse is for you. He has not forgotten you. At the right time, He will act.

8:2-5 *And the springs of **the** deep and the floodgates of the heavens were shut up, and the rain from the heavens was restrained. And the waters turned back from off the earth, going and turning back; and the waters decreased at the end of one hundred and fifty days. And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat. And the waters were going and decreasing until the tenth month; in the tenth **month**, on the first of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.*

God stopped the flood from both directions. "The springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens were shut up." The same God who opened them in 7:11 shut them now. He controls the waters, and He controls the timing.

"The waters turned back from off the earth, going and turning back." It was not sudden. It took months. "The ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat." Ararat was a region north of Mesopotamia, in what is now eastern Turkey and Armenia. The text says "the mountains of Ararat," a mountain range, not one named peak. Genesis doesn't name the exact spot where the ark landed, and claims to have found it should be treated with caution.

The word "rested" sounds like the name Noah, which means rest (5:29). The ark of rest came to rest. Two and a half more months passed before "the tops of the mountains were seen."

8:6-9 *And it came about at the end of forty days, and Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made. And he sent out the raven, and it went out, going out and returning, until the waters dried up from off the earth. And he sent out the dove from with him to see whether the waters had abated from off the face of the ground. And the dove did not find a resting place for the sole of its foot, and it returned to him into the ark, for water **was** on the face of all the earth; and he stretched out his hand and took it and brought it to him into the ark.*

After forty more days, Noah "opened the window of the ark which he had made" and sent out "the raven." The raven "went out, going out and returning, until the waters dried up from off the earth." A raven eats dead things and could survive on what floated on the water, so it didn't need to come back.

Then Noah sent out "the dove." The dove is a gentler bird that needs dry ground and clean food. It "did not find a resting place for the sole of its foot," and returned. That small detail is tender: Noah "stretched out his hand and took it and brought it to him into the ark." Noah was patient. He didn't force his way out of the ark. He waited for clear evidence that the time was right.

8:10-12 *And he waited yet another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark. And the dove came to him at the time of evening, and look, a freshly plucked olive leaf **was** in its mouth; and Noah knew that the waters had abated from off the earth. And he waited yet another seven days and sent out the dove, and it did not again return to him anymore.*

Noah "waited yet another seven days." Waiting is a theme of this chapter. Then he sent out the dove again, and this time she came back "in the evening" with "a freshly plucked olive leaf." Something was growing again. Life was returning to the earth. Ever since, the dove and the olive branch have been symbols of peace, and this story is one of the oldest sources of that picture.

Seven days later Noah sent her out again, and "it did not again return to him." She had found a home. Noah now knew the land was ready. Even so, he did not leave the ark on his own. He waited for God to tell him to go. That is wisdom. Evidence is good, but God's word is better.

8:13-14 *And it came about in the six hundred and first year, in the first **month**, on the first of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and look, the face of the ground was dried up. And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.*

"In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first of the month," Noah "removed the covering of the ark." The ground was dry. It was New Year's Day, the start of a new world.

Yet he still waited almost two more months until "the earth was dry" on "the twenty-seventh day" of the second month. If we compare this date with 7:11, Noah and his family were in the ark for about a year and ten days. That is a long time to live with a family and a boat full of animals. Faith often involves a long, unglamorous stretch of waiting and daily chores before the promise comes true.

8:15-19 *And God spoke to Noah, saying, "Go out from the ark, you and your wife and your sons and the wives of your sons with you. Every living thing that* ***is*** *with you of all flesh, among the flying things and among the livestock and among every moving thing that moves on the earth, bring out with you; and they shall swarm on the earth and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." And Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and the wives of his sons with him. Every living thing, every moving thing, and every flying thing, everything that moves on the earth, according to their families went out from the ark.*

"And God spoke to Noah." This is the first time God speaks in this chapter, and His word is simple: "Go out from the ark." God had shut Noah in (7:16). Now God sent him out. Noah went in at God's word, and he came out at God's word.

God repeated the blessing from creation: "be fruitful and multiply on the earth" (compare 1:22, 28). The earth was getting a fresh start, and God's original purpose for it had not changed. The animals went out "according to their families," just as orderly as they came in. God had kept every one of them alive.

8:20 *And Noah built an altar to the LORD, and he took from all the clean livestock and from every clean flying thing, and he offered up burnt offerings on the altar.*

The first thing Noah did was build "an altar to the LORD." This is the first altar mentioned in the Bible. An altar was a raised place where sacrifices were offered to God. Noah didn't build a house first, or plant a field first. He worshiped first. He gave God thanks before he did anything else.

He offered "burnt offerings," animals that were wholly burned on the altar, given completely to God. He took them "from all the clean livestock and from every clean flying thing." The extra clean animals God told him to bring (7:2) were for this. Noah gave back to God from the very animals God had saved. The burnt offering pictured complete surrender and also the need for a substitute to die for sin. It points ahead to Jesus, who offered His own body once for all (Hebrews 10:10).

8:21 *And the LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to His heart, "I will not again curse the ground anymore because of mankind, for the inclination of the heart of mankind* ***is*** *evil from his youth; and I will not again strike down every living thing anymore, as I have done.*

"The LORD smelled the soothing aroma." That is a way of saying God was pleased with Noah's worship and accepted it. Paul uses similar language when he says Christ gave Himself up for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma (Ephesians 5:2).

Then God made a promise: "I will not again curse the ground anymore because of mankind," and "I will not again strike down every living thing anymore, as I have done." Look at what God says about man: "the inclination of the heart of mankind is evil from his youth." That sounds a lot like 6:5. The flood did not change the human heart. Sin came through the flood inside the ark. God knew that, and He chose mercy anyway.

The answer to sin was never going to be wiping out sinners and starting over. People would always need a new heart. God would deal with sin a different way, by sending His Son to bear its judgment.

8:22 *All the days of the earth yet **to come**, seed and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."*

"All the days of the earth yet to come, seed and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." This is a promise God has kept every year since. Every sunrise, every spring planting, every harvest is a reminder that God keeps His word.

"All the days of the earth yet to come" also tells us this arrangement will not last forever. One day the present heavens and earth will pass away, and God will make a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1). Until then, the seasons go on, and every one of them is a sermon about God's faithfulness. Jeremiah 33:20-21 says that God's covenant is as sure as the fixed pattern of day and night. If you doubt God's promises, look out the window.

Chapter 8 Summary

God remembered Noah and the animals and sent a wind over the earth. The fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were closed, and the water steadily went down. The ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat, and the mountaintops appeared. Noah sent out a raven and then a dove. The dove returned the first time, came back with an olive leaf the second time, and did not return the third time. Noah removed the covering of the ark and saw the ground was dry, and when the earth was fully dry, God told Noah to bring his family and the animals out. Noah built an altar and offered burnt offerings. The LORD was pleased, and He promised never again to curse the ground or destroy every living thing as He had done, and that as long as the earth remains, the seasons and day and night will not cease.

People and Places

- Ararat: a mountainous region north of Mesopotamia, in what is now eastern Turkey and Armenia, where the ark came to rest (8:4).

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. What does it mean that "God remembered Noah"? (8:1)

2. God sent His wind over the waters, as His Spirit hovered over the waters at creation (8:1; 1:2). In what ways is chapter 8 like a new beginning for the world?

3. Where did the ark come to rest? (8:4)

4. Why did the raven not come back, while the dove did? (8:7-9)

5. The olive leaf told Noah that life was returning to the earth (8:11). What small signs of hope has God given you in a hard season?

6. Why do you think Noah waited for God's word before leaving the ark? (8:13-16)

7. What was the first thing Noah did when he left the ark? (8:20)

8. What did God promise in 8:21-22, and what reason did He give?

9. Noah worshiped first, before building a home or planting a field. What would it look like to put worship first in your day or week?

10. Is there a season in your life where God seems silent? How does 8:1 encourage you?

Chapter 9: God's Covenant with Noah

Scripture

9:1-7 And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every living thing of the earth and on every flying thing of the heavens, on everything ***with*** which the ground moves, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are given. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; like the green plant, I have given to you everything. Only flesh with its life, its blood, you shall not eat. And surely your blood, for your lives, I will require; from the hand of every living thing I will require it; and from the hand of man, from the hand of each man's brother, I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man. And you, be fruitful and multiply; swarm on the earth and multiply on it."

9:8-17 And God said to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, "And I, look, I am about to establish My covenant with you and with your seed after you, and with every living being that ***is*** with you, among the flying things, among the livestock, and among every living thing of the earth with you, from all who came out of the ark, to every living thing of the earth. And I will establish My covenant with you, and all flesh shall not be cut off again by the waters of the flood, and there shall not again be a flood to destroy the earth." And God said, "This ***is*** the sign of the covenant which I am setting between Me and you and every living being that ***is*** with you, for everlasting generations: My bow I have set in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, and the bow is seen in the cloud, and I will remember My covenant which ***is*** between Me and you and every living being among all flesh; and the waters shall not again become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will see it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living being among all flesh which ***is*** on the earth." And God said to Noah, "This ***is*** the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh which ***is*** on the earth."

9:18-29 And the sons of Noah who came out from the ark were Shem and Ham and Japheth; and Ham, he ***was*** the father of Canaan. These three ***were*** the sons of Noah, and from these all the earth spread abroad. And Noah, the man of the ground, began, and he planted a vineyard. And he drank from the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself in the midst of his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and he told his two brothers outside. And Shem and Japheth took the garment and put ***it*** on the shoulder of both of them, and they walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces ***were*** backward, and the nakedness of their father they did not see. And Noah awoke from his wine, and he knew what his youngest son had done to him. And he said, "Cursed ***be*** Canaan; a slave of slaves he shall be to his brothers." And he said, "Blessed ***be*** the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be a slave to them. May God make room for Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be a slave to them." And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died.

Chapter 9 Preview

Noah and his family step out into a washed and empty world. God meets them there with a blessing. He repeats the command He gave Adam to be fruitful and fill the earth, and He gives new instructions for life after the flood: animals could now be eaten, blood was not to be eaten with the meat, and human life was sacred because people are made in God's image. Anyone who murdered would answer for it.

Then God makes a covenant with Noah, his descendants and every living creature: He will never again destroy the earth with a flood. He sets His rainbow in the clouds as the sign of that promise. The chapter ends with a sad scene. Noah gets drunk, his son Ham dishonors him, and Noah pronounces a curse on Ham's son Canaan and a blessing on Shem and Japheth. Even after a new start, the old sin is still in the human heart.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1-2 *And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every living thing of the earth and on every flying thing of the heavens, on everything* ***with*** *which the ground moves, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are given.*

"God blessed Noah and his sons." The new world begins the way the first one did, with God's blessing and the command to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (1:28). God had not given up on the human race or on His purpose for it.

Something had changed, though. "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every living thing of the earth." Before the fall, man ruled over the animals in peace. Now many animals would be afraid of people and keep their distance. Man still had authority over creation, "into your hand they are given," but it would no longer be the easy harmony of Eden. The relationship between man and the animal world was one more thing broken by sin.

9:3-4 *Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; like the green plant, I have given to you everything. Only flesh with its life, its blood, you shall not eat.*

"Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you." Before the flood, God gave people plants to eat (1:29). Now He gave them animals as well. Eating meat is a gift God gave, not a sin, and Jesus later declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19).

There was one limit: "Only flesh with its life, its blood, you shall not eat." Blood stands for life. Leviticus 17:11 explains that "the life of the flesh is in the blood," and that God gave blood on the altar to make atonement. To pour the blood out was a way of saying that life belongs to God. Even when we take an animal's life for food, we do it with respect for the Giver of life. This rule is so basic that the early church asked Gentile believers (believers who were not Jewish) to keep it to avoid offending Jewish believers (Acts 15:20).

9:5-6 *And surely your blood, for your lives, I will require; from the hand of every living thing I will require it; and from the hand of man, from the hand of each man's brother, I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.*

God takes human life even more seriously. "Surely your blood, for your lives, I will require; from the hand of every living thing I will require it; and from the hand of man, from the hand of each man's brother, I will require the life of man." God Himself will hold accountable any person, or even any animal, that takes a human life. Cain's murder of his brother (4:8) and Lamech's boasting (4:23-24) had filled the world with violence. God now drew a firm line.

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man his blood shall be shed." God gave people the responsibility to punish murder. Many Bible teachers see this as the beginning of human government, the authority God gave to protect life and restrain evil. Paul says the governing authority does not "bear the sword in vain" (Romans 13:4). Most conservative teachers believe this verse supports the death penalty for murder when it is carried out justly by rightful authority, not by personal revenge.

The reason is the heart of the verse: "For in the image of God He made man." Murder is wrong because every person carries God's image. To destroy a human being is to attack something that bears God's likeness. This still applies today. The life of the unborn child, the elderly person, the disabled person and the stranger all matter to God for this very reason.

9:7 *And you, be fruitful and multiply; swarm on the earth and multiply on it."*

God repeats His command: "be fruitful and multiply; swarm on the earth and multiply on it." He says it twice in this chapter, as bookends around His teaching on life and blood (9:1, 7). God's heart is for life.

After the flood, Noah's family might have been afraid to start over or have children in a world that had just seen such judgment. God's repeated word tells them to go ahead and live. His purpose is still for the earth to be filled with people who bear His image. In God's eyes children are part of His blessing, not a burden.

9:8-11 *And God said to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, "And I, look, I am about to establish My covenant with you and with your seed after you, and with every living being that* ***is*** *with you, among the flying things, among the livestock, and among every living thing of the earth with you, from all who came out of the ark, to every living thing of the earth. And I will establish My covenant with you, and all flesh shall not be cut off again by the waters of the flood, and there shall not again be a flood to destroy the earth."*

"And I, look, I am about to establish My covenant with you." God promised this covenant in 6:18, and now He spells it out. It is made "with you and with your seed after you," and "with every living being." That includes you and me, and every animal alive today.

This covenant is unconditional. God does not say that He will hold back the waters only if people obey Him. He simply promises it. Nothing is required of Noah. God binds Himself by His own

word. "And there shall not again be a flood to destroy the earth." There have been many terrible local floods since then, but never again a flood like Noah's that covers the whole earth. That fact is one reason I believe the flood of chapters 6 to 8 was worldwide (see 7:19-20).

9:12-17 *And God said, "This **is** the sign of the covenant which I am setting between Me and you and every living being that **is** with you, for everlasting generations: My bow I have set in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, and the bow is seen in the cloud, and I will remember My covenant which **is** between Me and you and every living being among all flesh; and the waters shall not again become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will see it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living being among all flesh which **is** on the earth." And God said to Noah, "This **is** the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh which **is** on the earth."*

God gave a sign: "My bow I have set in the cloud." The word bow is the word for a warrior's bow. Some Bible teachers see a beautiful picture here. God hung up His bow in the sky, pointed away from the earth, as if laying down His weapon. Whether or not that was the intended picture, the rainbow is a sign of peace.

A sign of a covenant is a visible reminder of a promise. Later the sign of God's covenant with Abraham will be circumcision (17:11), and the sign of the covenant with Israel at Sinai will be the Sabbath (Exodus 31:16-17). The rainbow is the sign of this covenant.

Who is the rainbow for? "I will see it, to remember the everlasting covenant." God says He will look at the rainbow and remember. Of course God doesn't forget. He is telling us, in words we can understand, that when we see the rainbow, He sees it too, and He is keeping His word. In Revelation 4:3 John saw a rainbow around God's throne. The covenant-keeping God is still on His throne. The next time you see a rainbow, let it remind you that God keeps His promises.

9:18-19 *And the sons of Noah who came out from the ark were Shem and Ham and Japheth; and Ham, he **was** the father of Canaan. These three **were** the sons of Noah, and from these all the earth spread abroad.*

The narrative turns to Noah's sons: "Shem and Ham and Japheth; and Ham, he was the father of Canaan." Moses mentions Canaan here because it will matter in a few verses, and because the people of Canaan would later be the nations living in the land God promised to Israel.

"From these all the earth spread abroad." Every person alive today descends from Noah through one of these three sons. That means the whole human race is one family. Paul told the Athenians that God made from one man every nation of mankind (Acts 17:26). There is only one race, the human race. Chapter 10 will give the family tree.

9:20-21 *And Noah, the man of the ground, began, and he planted a vineyard. And he drank from the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself in the midst of his tent.*

"Noah, the man of the ground, began, and he planted a vineyard." Then "he drank from the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself in the midst of his tent." The righteous man who walked with God, who built the ark and offered sacrifices, fell into sin.

The Bible does not hide the failures of its heroes, and it does not approve of them either. Noah's drunkenness was wrong. Proverbs 20:1 warns that wine is a mocker, and Paul says, "do not be drunk with wine" (Ephesians 5:18). Some have tried to excuse Noah, saying he did not know what wine would do. Genesis is silent on that. What it shows is that even a godly man can fall, often after a great victory, when he relaxes his guard. None of us is beyond the reach of temptation (1 Corinthians 10:12).

9:22-23 *And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and he told his two brothers outside. And Shem and Japheth took the garment and put **it** on the shoulder of both of them, and they walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces **were** backward, and the nakedness of their father they did not see.*

"Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and he told his two brothers outside." Some think Ham did something worse than look, but the text only says he saw and told. Either way, his response was the opposite of honor. Instead of covering his father's shame, he spread it. He seems to have enjoyed exposing his father's failure.

Shem and Japheth did the opposite. They "took the garment," walked in "backward," and "covered the nakedness of their father." "The nakedness of their father they did not see." They respected their father even when he was at his worst.

We all need this lesson. When a brother or sister falls, will we spread the news or cover it with love? Covering sin in this sense doesn't mean pretending it didn't happen or hiding it from those who need to deal with it. It means refusing to make a show of someone's shame. Proverbs 10:12 says "love covers over all transgressions." Paul tells us to restore a fallen believer "in a spirit of gentleness" (Galatians 6:1).

9:24-25 *And Noah awoke from his wine, and he knew what his youngest son had done to him. And he said, "Cursed **be** Canaan; a slave of slaves he shall be to his brothers."*

When Noah "awoke from his wine, and he knew what his youngest son had done to him," he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves he shall be to his brothers." The curse fell on Canaan, Ham's son, not on Ham himself, and not on Ham's other sons (10:6). Why Noah named Canaan is not explained. Perhaps Canaan was involved, or perhaps Noah, speaking as a prophet, saw that Canaan's descendants would follow Ham's sin and go even further. The Canaanites became known for gross immorality (Leviticus 18:3, 24-25), and centuries later Israel took their land and some of them became servants (Joshua 9:23).

This needs to be said plainly. This curse fell on Canaan. It was not a curse on any race of people, and it was not a curse on Africans or people with dark skin. For centuries some people misused

this passage to defend slavery and racism. That was wrong. It twisted God's Word to excuse terrible sin. The Bible teaches that every person is made in God's image (9:6), that all nations come from one man (Acts 17:26), and that in Christ there is neither "slave nor free" (Galatians 3:28). Heaven will be filled with people from every nation and tribe and tongue (Revelation 7:9).

9:26-27 *And he said, "Blessed **be** the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be a slave to them. May God make room for Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be a slave to them."*

Noah then blessed his other sons. "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem." Instead of blessing Shem directly, Noah blessed Shem's God. It was the highest blessing he could give. The LORD would be known as Shem's God. From Shem would come Abraham, the nation of Israel, and in the fullness of time Jesus the Messiah (Luke 3:36). The word Semitic comes from the name Shem.

"May God make room for Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem." The name Japheth is a play on the Hebrew word for making room or enlarging. Japheth's descendants spread widely (10:2-5). To "dwell in the tents of Shem" suggests sharing in Shem's blessing. Many Bible teachers see this fulfilled when the Gentile nations came to share in the blessings God gave through Israel and her Messiah. Paul describes Gentile believers as wild branches grafted into Israel's olive tree (Romans 11:17), and he warns them not to be proud, because God still has a future for Israel (Romans 11:18, 25-26).

9:28-29 *And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died.*

"Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years." He lived long enough to see his grandchildren and great-grandchildren spread out. If the genealogy in chapter 11 has no gaps, Noah lived until about the time Abram was born. Depending on how we read Terah's age (11:26, 32), Noah either died a couple of years before Abram's birth or lived until Abram was about fifty-eight. Either way, Noah's son Shem lived on well into Abraham's life. Then "all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died."

The old refrain from chapter 5 returns: "and he died." Even Noah, the man God saved through the flood, could not escape death. The flood washed the world, but it could not wash the human heart or defeat death. We need a greater Savior than Noah, and God has given Him to us in Jesus, who died and rose again to break death's hold.

Chapter 9 Summary

God blessed Noah and his sons and told them again to be fruitful and fill the earth. Animals would now fear people, and God gave animals for food, but forbade eating meat with its blood. Because people are made in God's image, God would require the life of anyone who murdered, and gave people the responsibility to punish murder. God made an unconditional, everlasting covenant with Noah, his descendants and every living creature, promising never again to destroy the earth with a flood, and set the rainbow in the clouds as its sign. Noah planted a vineyard, got drunk, and

lay uncovered in his tent. Ham saw and told his brothers, while Shem and Japheth covered their father without looking. Noah cursed Canaan, Ham's son, blessed the LORD as the God of Shem, and prayed that God would enlarge Japheth. Noah lived 350 years after the flood and died at 950.

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. After a terrible judgment, God told Noah's family twice to be fruitful and fill the earth (9:1, 7). Why might they have needed that word, and what does it show about God's heart?

2. What new food did God give, and what was the one limit? (9:3-4)

3. Why is murder so serious in God's eyes? (9:6)

4. What did God promise in His covenant with Noah, and with whom did He make it? (9:9-11)

5. What is the sign of this covenant, and what does it remind us of? (9:12-17)

6. Noah, a righteous man, fell into sin after a great deliverance (9:20-21). Why do you think we are often open to temptation after a time of success, and how can we guard against it?

7. How did Ham's response differ from Shem and Japheth's? (9:22-23)

8. On whom did the curse fall, and why is it wrong to use this passage to support racism or slavery? (9:25; Acts 17:26)

9. When a fellow believer falls, are you more likely to spread it or to cover it with love? What would it look like to respond like Shem and Japheth?

10. Every person you meet is made in God's image (9:6). How should that shape the way you treat people who are different from you?

Chapter 10: The Table of Nations

Scripture

10:1-5 And these ***are*** the generations of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth; and sons were born to them after the flood. The sons of Japheth ***were*** Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras. And the sons of Gomer ***were*** Ashkenaz and Riphath and Togarmah. And the sons of Javan ***were*** Elishah and Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim. From these the coastlands of the nations were separated in their lands, each according to his language, according to their families, in their nations.

10:6-20 And the sons of Ham ***were*** Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan. And the sons of Cush ***were*** Seba and Havilah and Sabtah and Raamah and Sabteca; and the sons of Raamah ***were*** Sheba and Dedan. And Cush fathered Nimrod; he began to be a mighty ***man*** on the earth. He was a mighty ***man*** of hunting before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty ***man*** of hunting before the LORD." And the beginning of his kingdom was Babylon and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went out ***to*** Assyria, and he built Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that ***is*** the great city. And Mizraim fathered the Ludim and the Anamim and the Lehabim and the Naphtuhim and the Pathrusim and the Casluhim, from where the Philistines came out, and the Caphtorim. And Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn, and Heth, and the Jebusite and the Amorite and the Girgashite and the Hivite and the Arkite and the Sinite and the Arvadite and the Zemarite and the Hamathite; and afterward the families of the Canaanite were scattered. And the border of the Canaanite was from Sidon, as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. These ***are*** the sons of Ham according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands, in their nations.

10:21-32 And to Shem, the father of all the sons of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder, to him also ***sons*** were born. The sons of Shem ***were*** Elam and Asshur and Arpachshad and Lud and Aram. And the sons of Aram ***were*** Uz and Hul and Gether and Mash. And Arpachshad fathered Shelah, and Shelah fathered Eber. And to Eber were born two sons; the name of the one ***was*** Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided; and the name of his brother ***was*** Joktan. And Joktan fathered Almodad and Sheleph and Hazarmaveth and Jerah and Hadoram and Uzal and Diklah and Obal and Abimael and Sheba and Ophir and Havilah and Jobab; all these ***were*** the sons of Joktan. And their dwelling place was from Mesha, as you go toward Sephar, the hill country of the east. These ***are*** the sons of Shem according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands, according to their nations. These ***are*** the families of the sons of Noah according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood.

Chapter 10 Preview

Chapter 10 is often called the Table of Nations. It traces how the families of Noah's three sons, Japheth, Ham and Shem, spread out after the flood and became the peoples of the ancient world.

Many of the names are the names of nations we meet later in the Bible: Egypt, Canaan, Assyria, the Philistines, the Greeks and more.

It can look like a long list of hard names, but it carries a big message. Every nation on earth comes from one family. God knows them all by name, and He has a plan for all of them. The chapter also introduces Nimrod, a mighty man who built the first great cities, including Babel and Nineveh, and it follows the line of Shem down to Eber, the ancestor of the Hebrews. That sets the stage for chapter 11 and the call of Abram, through whom God will bless all the families of the earth.

Chapter 10 Study

10:1 *And these **are** the generations of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth; and sons were born to them after the flood.*

"And these are the generations of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth." This is another of the "generations" headings that divide Genesis (2:4; 5:1; 6:9). The order of the sons in the chapter itself is worth seeing. Moses lists Japheth first, then Ham, and saves Shem for last. That is the pattern Genesis often follows: it deals briefly with the side branches and then comes back to the line of promise and stays with it.

Noah's sons had sons of their own: "sons were born to them after the flood." God's command to be fruitful and fill the earth (9:1) was being obeyed. The chapter describes the result. Chapter 11 will explain one of the main reasons the nations spread out: God scattered them at Babel. In time order, the events of chapter 10 overlap with those of chapter 11. It shows us the map before it tells us how the map came to be.

10:2-5 *The sons of Japheth **were** Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras. And the sons of Gomer **were** Ashkenaz and Riphath and Togarmah. And the sons of Javan **were** Elishah and Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim. From these the coastlands of the nations were separated in their lands, each according to his language, according to their families, in their nations.*

Japheth's descendants are listed first. Many scholars connect several of these names with peoples known from history. Javan is the Hebrew name for the Greeks (the Ionians). Madai is usually identified with the Medes. Gomer, Magog, Tubal and Meshech are often placed to the north, around the Black Sea and what is now Turkey. Tarshish was a distant seaport, possibly in Spain, and Kittim is usually linked with Cyprus.

"From these the coastlands of the nations were separated in their lands," Japheth's family spread north and west, along the coasts and islands of the Mediterranean and beyond. That fits Noah's prayer, "May God make room for Japheth" (9:27).

The words "according to their languages" look ahead to chapter 11, where God confused the languages. Each family group ended up with its own land and its own tongue.

10:6-7 *And the sons of Ham **were** Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan. And the sons of Cush **were** Seba and Havilah and Sabtah and Raamah and Sabteca; and the sons of Raamah **were** Sheba and Dedan.*

Ham's sons were "Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan." Mizraim is the Hebrew name for Egypt, and the Bible uses it that way hundreds of times. Cush is usually the region south of Egypt, sometimes called Ethiopia in older translations. Put is often identified with Libya, west of Egypt. And Canaan is the land that would later be promised to Abraham.

Cush's line included Sheba and Dedan, sons of Raamah, names linked with Arabia. The queen of Sheba who visited Solomon (1 Kings 10) likely came from this region. These verses are a reminder that Africa and Arabia are part of the Bible's story from the start. God has always had all nations in view.

10:8-12 *And Cush fathered Nimrod; he began to be a mighty **man** on the earth. He was a mighty **man** of hunting before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty **man** of hunting before the LORD." And the beginning of his kingdom was Babylon and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went out **to** Assyria, and he built Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that **is** the great city.*

The list pauses to tell us about one man: "Nimrod; he began to be a mighty man on the earth." He was "a mighty man of hunting before the LORD," so famous that people said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty man of hunting before the LORD."

What does "before the LORD" mean here? It can simply mean that God saw him, or that he was great in God's sight. Many Bible teachers, though, see something darker. His name resembles a Hebrew word meaning we will rebel, and the next verses show him building a kingdom. Some think he hunted men as well as animals, gathering power by force. We can't be sure.

What we do know is that "the beginning of his kingdom was Babylon," along with other cities in "the land of Shinar," which is Babylonia, in southern Mesopotamia. Then he went into Assyria and "built Nineveh." In Hebrew that first city is Babel, and it grew into the great city of Babylon. Nineveh became the capital of Assyria. Both cities would later become cruel enemies of God's people. Nimrod is the first man in the Bible said to have a kingdom. Man was building his own kingdoms, apart from God. The rest of the Bible tells how God is building His.

10:13-14 *And Mizraim fathered the Ludim and the Anamim and the Lehabim and the Naphtuhim and the Pathrusim and the Casluhim, from where the Philistines came out, and the Caphtorim.*

Mizraim, or Egypt, was the father of several peoples, most of them hard to identify today. One phrase stands out: "the Casluhim, from where the Philistines came out." The Philistines would become Israel's long-running enemies in the days of the judges and of Saul and David. Goliath was a Philistine.

The Bible elsewhere connects the Philistines with Caphtor, which many scholars identify with the island of Crete (Amos 9:7). Moses is giving Israel the family background of the peoples they

would one day meet. When Israel later faced these nations, they could remember that every one of them came from Noah, and that the God of Israel is the God of the whole earth.

10:15-20 *And Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn, and Heth, and the Jebusite and the Amorite and the Girgashite and the Hivite and the Arkite and the Sinite and the Arvadite and the Zemarite and the Hamathite; and afterward the families of the Canaanite were scattered. And the border of the Canaanite was from Sidon, as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. These **are** the sons of Ham according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands, in their nations.*

Canaan's descendants are listed in detail: Sidon, Heth (the ancestor of the Hittites), and a list of peoples that will appear again and again in the books of Moses and Joshua: "the Jebusite and the Amorite and the Girgashite," "the Hivite," and others. These are the nations living in the land God promised to Abraham's descendants (15:18-21).

Verse 19 traces the borders of Canaan, from Sidon in the north to Gaza in the southwest, and toward "Sodom and Gomorrah" in the southeast. Sodom will soon play a big part in the story of Abraham and Lot (chapters 13, 14, 18, 19).

Why so much detail on Canaan? Because the first readers of Genesis were Israelites about to enter that land. God wanted them to know who lived there and how those peoples were connected to the rest of the world. God's promise of the land to Israel was not vague. It had real borders and real neighbors.

10:21-24 *And to Shem, the father of all the sons of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder, to him also **sons** were born. The sons of Shem **were** Elam and Asshur and Arpachshad and Lud and Aram. And the sons of Aram **were** Uz and Hul and Gether and Mash. And Arpachshad fathered Shelah, and Shelah fathered Eber.*

Now we come to Shem, the line Moses has been saving for last. Shem is called "the father of all the sons of Eber." Eber is the man whose name most likely gave us the word "Hebrew." Shem had other descendants too. Asshur gave his name to Assyria, Elam to a people east of Babylon in what is now Iran, and Aram to the Arameans, the people of Syria. Abraham's own relatives would later live in Aram (24:10).

The line we care most about goes from Shem to "Arpachshad," then to "Shelah," then to "Eber." This is the line that leads to Abraham (11:10-26), and through Abraham to David and to Jesus (Luke 3:34-36).

10:25 *And to Eber were born two sons; the name of the one **was** Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided; and the name of his brother **was** Joktan.*

Eber had two sons. One was named "Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided." The name Peleg means division. What division is this? Most Bible teachers believe it refers to the scattering of the nations at Babel in chapter 11, when God divided the languages and the peoples spread out. That fits the setting of this chapter, which is all about how the nations were divided into their lands.

Some have suggested other ideas, such as a division of the land masses, but the text gives us little to build on there.

In any case, the verse quietly marks a turning point. Peleg is in the line that leads to Abraham (11:16-26). The world was being divided, but God was keeping His promised line intact.

10:26-31 *And Joktan fathered Almodad and Sheleph and Hazarmaveth and Jerah and Hadoram and Uzal and Diklah and Obal and Abimael and Sheba and Ophir and Havilah and Jobab; all these **were** the sons of Joktan. And their dwelling place was from Mesha, as you go toward Sephar, the hill country of the east. These **are** the sons of Shem according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands, according to their nations.*

Peleg's brother Joktan had thirteen sons, and many of them are linked with tribes in Arabia. Three names stand out. "Ophir" became famous as a land of gold in Solomon's day (1 Kings 9:28). "Sheba" and "Havilah" appear here as well as in Ham's line (10:7), which shows that different families sometimes settled in the same regions or used similar names.

Verse 31 sums up Shem's family with the same pattern used for Japheth and Ham: "according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands, according to their nations." God's order is still at work after the flood. Families grew into peoples, peoples into nations, each with its own language and territory.

10:32 *These **are** the families of the sons of Noah according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood.*

"These are the families of the sons of Noah." The whole list adds up to about seventy names. Some Bible teachers connect this number with Deuteronomy 32:8, which says God set the boundaries of the peoples. Seventy is also the number of Jacob's family who went down into Egypt (46:27). Whether or not we press the number, the lesson is the same. God knows every nation by name.

"From these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood." Every nation on earth comes from this one family. Paul said the same thing in Athens: God made from one man every nation of mankind and determined their times and boundaries (Acts 17:26). That means there is no room for racial pride. We are all cousins.

The Table of Nations is also a missionary chapter. God did not forget the nations when He chose Abraham in chapter 12. He chose Abraham so that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed (12:3). Jesus sent His disciples to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19), and one day people from every nation will stand before His throne (Revelation 7:9). The list in Genesis 10 is the beginning of the guest list.

Chapter 10 Summary

Chapter 10 lists the descendants of Noah's three sons after the flood. Japheth's line spread north and west along the coastlands, including peoples many identify as the Greeks and the Medes. Ham's line included Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan, and from Cush came Nimrod, a mighty hunter and the first man said to have a kingdom, who built Babel and other cities in Shinar and then

Nineveh in Assyria. From Egypt came the Philistines, and from Canaan came the peoples who would live in the land later promised to Abraham. Shem's line included Elam, Asshur and Aram, and through Arpachshad and Shelah it reached Eber, the ancestor of the Hebrews. In the days of Eber's son Peleg the earth was divided. All the nations on earth came from these families of Noah's sons.

People and Places

- Japheth: Noah's son whose descendants spread north and west, including peoples many identify as the Greeks (Javan) and the Medes (Madai).
- Ham: Noah's son, father of Cush, Mizraim (Egypt), Put and Canaan.
- Shem: Noah's son, ancestor of Eber, Abraham, Israel and Jesus.
- Cush: a people and region usually placed south of Egypt.
- Mizraim: the Hebrew name for Egypt.
- Canaan: Ham's son and the land his descendants settled, later promised to Abraham.
- Nimrod: a descendant of Cush, a mighty hunter who founded Babel and built Nineveh.
- Shinar: the plain of southern Mesopotamia, later called Babylonia.
- Nineveh: a great city Nimrod built in Assyria, later Assyria's capital.
- Philistines: a people who came from Mizraim's line and became Israel's enemies.
- Eber: a descendant of Shem, in the line that leads to Abraham (10:21-25).
- Peleg: Eber's son, in whose days the earth was divided.

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. Why do you think God put a long list of names like this in His Word, and what does it tell you about how He sees the nations? (10:1, 32)

2. Where did Japheth's descendants settle? (10:5)

3. Name the four sons of Ham. Which one later gave his name to the land promised to Abraham? (10:6)

4. What do we learn about Nimrod, and what cities did he build? (10:8-12)

5. Even the Philistines, Israel's long-running enemies, came from Noah's family (10:14). How does it change the way you see people who oppose you to know that God made them and knows them by name?

6. Why do you think Moses gave so much detail about Canaan's descendants and borders? (10:15-19)

7. Who was Eber, and why does his line matter? (10:21, 24-25)

8. What does 10:32 (and Acts 17:26) teach about where all nations come from?

9. Since every nation comes from one family, how should that shape the way you think about people of other races and nations?

10. God had all the nations in view from the beginning. What is one way you can take part in reaching the nations with the gospel?

Chapter 11: The Tower of Babel

Scripture

11:1-9 And all the earth was ***of*** one language and ***of the*** same words. And it happened, as they set out from the east, and they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. And they said each to his neighbor, "Come, let us make bricks and burn ***them*** with burning." And the brick was to them for stone, and the bitumen was to them for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city and a tower, and its top ***will be*** in the heavens; and let us make for ourselves a name, lest we be scattered over the face of all the earth." And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of mankind had built. And the LORD said, "Look, ***they are*** one people, and one language ***is*** to all of them, and this ***is what*** they begin to do; and now nothing that they plan to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and let Us confuse their language there, so that they will not understand, each the language of his neighbor." And the LORD scattered them from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased to build the city. Therefore ***one*** called its name Babylon, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them over the face of all the earth.

11:10-26 These ***are*** the generations of Shem: Shem ***was*** a son of a hundred years, and he fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood. And Shem lived after he fathered Arpachshad five hundred years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Arpachshad lived thirty-five years, and he fathered Shelah. And Arpachshad lived after he fathered Shelah four hundred and three years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Shelah lived thirty years, and he fathered Eber. And Shelah lived after he fathered Eber four hundred and three years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Eber lived thirty-four years, and he fathered Peleg. And Eber lived after he fathered Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Peleg lived thirty years, and he fathered Reu. And Peleg lived after he fathered Reu two hundred and nine years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Reu lived thirty-two years, and he fathered Serug. And Reu lived after he fathered Serug two hundred and seven years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Serug lived thirty years, and he fathered Nahor. And Serug lived after he fathered Nahor two hundred years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and he fathered Terah. And Nahor lived after he fathered Terah a hundred and nineteen years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Terah lived seventy years, and he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

11:27-32 And these ***are*** the generations of Terah: Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. And Haran died in the presence of Terah his father, in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of the wife of Abram ***was*** Sarai, and the name of the wife of Nahor ***was*** Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and the father of Iscah. And Sarai was barren; she had no child. And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, the wife of Abram his son; and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came as far as Haran, and they dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.

Chapter 11 Preview

After the flood, God told Noah's family to fill the earth (9:1). In chapter 11, their descendants do the opposite. They settle on a plain in Shinar and start to build a city and a tower so they will not be scattered. They want to make a name for themselves. God comes down, confuses their language, and scatters them over the whole earth. The place is called Babel.

The rest of the chapter narrows the story. Moses traces the line of Shem down ten generations, from Shem to Terah's son Abram. Abram's wife Sarai cannot have children. Terah takes the family out of Ur toward Canaan, but they stop in Haran. The whole world has been scattered, and now God is about to begin something new with one man.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1-2 *And all the earth was **of** one language and **of the** same words. And it happened, as they set out from the east, and they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.*

Having "one language and of the same words" means everyone could understand everyone. Chapter 10 already listed the nations with their own languages (10:5, 20, 31). Chapter 11 steps back and tells us how those languages came about. Genesis often gives the big picture first and then goes back to explain how it happened.

As the people "set out from the east," they "found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there." Shinar is the region later called Babylonia, in what is now southern Iraq. Nimrod built his kingdom there (10:10). God had said to fill the earth. These people found a nice flat spot and decided to stay put. Settling down is not a sin in itself, but settling down against God's word is.

11:3-4 *And they said each to his neighbor, "Come, let us make bricks and burn **them** with burning." And the brick was to them for stone, and the bitumen was to them for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city and a tower, and its top **will be** in the heavens; and let us make for ourselves a name, lest we be scattered over the face of all the earth."*

Southern Mesopotamia had little stone, so they baked mud bricks hard in a fire and used tar, a kind of natural asphalt, for mortar. Ancient records and ruins in that region show many towers built in steps, called ziggurats, often topped with a small temple. Many believe Babel was an early tower of that kind.

Their goals tell the story. They wanted a tower whose "top will be in the heavens." They wanted to "make for ourselves a name." And they wanted to avoid being "scattered over the face of all the earth," which was the very thing God had told them to do. The whole project was about human pride and human security, with God left out.

Compare this with the next chapter. These people wanted to make their own name great. God will promise Abram that He will "make your name great" (12:2). The world grasps for a name. God gives one to those who trust Him.

11:5 *And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of mankind had built.*

"The LORD came down to see." The builders thought their tower would reach heaven. From heaven's point of view it was so small that God had to come down to look at it. Moses is gently mocking human pride.

God knows everything, so He did not need to come down to find out what was happening. Scripture often speaks of God this way to show us that He takes a close look before He judges. He did the same at Sodom (18:21). God is never hasty or unfair. When He acts, He acts on full knowledge.

11:6-7 *And the LORD said, "Look, **they are** one people, and one language **is** to all of them, and this **is what** they begin to do; and now nothing that they plan to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and let Us confuse their language there, so that they will not understand, each the language of his neighbor."*

God said that if this went on, "nothing that they plan to do will be withheld from them." He did not mean they could actually storm heaven. He meant that a united humanity, set against Him, would go further and further into rebellion. God's judgment here was also a mercy. By breaking up their plans, He slowed the spread of evil.

"Come, let Us go down." God speaks in the plural, just as in 1:26 ("Let Us make mankind") and 3:22. Some see this as a king speaking of himself in a royal way. I believe, along with many teachers, that these verses give us an early hint of the Trinity, one God in three Persons, which the New Testament makes clear.

The builders said "Come, let us" twice (11:3-4). God answers them with His own "Come, let Us."

11:8-9 *And the LORD scattered them from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased to build the city. Therefore **one** called its name Babylon, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them over the face of all the earth.*

"And the LORD scattered them." What they feared most is exactly what happened. You cannot build your way out from under God's command.

The SLB prints the name in 11:9 as Babylon. In Hebrew it is Babel, a name that sounds like the Hebrew verb balal, which means to confuse. The people of Babylon later said their city's name meant gate of god. Moses uses a play on words to say it really means confusion. Babel, or Babylon, becomes a picture in Scripture of the world organized against God, all the way to Revelation 17-18.

God has a beautiful answer to Babel. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came, and people from many nations heard the gospel each in their own language (Acts 2:5-11). At Babel, languages divided people. In Christ, God gathers people from every tribe and tongue into one family (Revelation 7:9). Babel scattered. The gospel gathers.

11:10-17 *These **are** the generations of Shem: Shem **was** a son of a hundred years, and he fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood. And Shem lived after he fathered Arpachshad five hundred years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Arpachshad lived thirty-five years, and he fathered Shelah. And Arpachshad lived after he fathered Shelah four hundred and three years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Shelah lived thirty years, and he fathered Eber. And Shelah lived after he fathered Eber four hundred and three years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Eber lived thirty-four years, and he fathered Peleg. And Eber lived after he fathered Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and he fathered sons and daughters.*

Now the story narrows to the line of Shem, the son through whom the blessing would come (9:26). "These are the generations" is a phrase Genesis uses to start each new section of the book.

Like the list in chapter 5, this one gives each man's age when his son was born and how long he lived after that. Shem lived 600 years in all, but the life spans are already getting shorter: Arpachshad lived 438 years, Eber 464, and Peleg only 239. Something changed after the flood, though Genesis does not say what.

Eber and Peleg are names we met in chapter 10. Eber is the ancestor whose name most likely gave us the word Hebrew (10:21), and Peleg is the one in whose days the earth was divided (10:25), which many connect with Babel.

New Testament links: Luke 3:34-36 (alluded to)

11:18-26 *And Peleg lived thirty years, and he fathered Reu. And Peleg lived after he fathered Reu two hundred and nine years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Reu lived thirty-two years, and he fathered Serug. And Reu lived after he fathered Serug two hundred and seven years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Serug lived thirty years, and he fathered Nahor. And Serug lived after he fathered Nahor two hundred years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and he fathered Terah. And Nahor lived after he fathered Terah a hundred and nineteen years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Terah lived seventy years, and he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran.*

The list keeps going, from Peleg to Reu, Serug, Nahor and Terah. The ages keep dropping. Nahor, Terah's father, lived only 148 years. By the time of Abraham, men lived to around 175, and by the time of Moses, about 120.

"Terah lived seventy years, and he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran." That does not have to mean all three were born the same year. Abram is listed first because he is the most important, not necessarily because he was the oldest. Comparing 11:32 with 12:4 and Acts 7:4, many believe Abram was born when Terah was about 130. Here is how the numbers work. Terah died at 205 (11:32). Abram left Haran at seventy-five (12:4), and Stephen says he left after his father died (Acts 7:4). 205 minus 75 is 130.

These lists can feel dry, but they matter. They show us that God kept the line of promise through every generation, from Adam to Noah to Abram, and on down to Jesus (Luke 3:34-36). God does not lose track of His promises.

New Testament links: Luke 3:34-36 (alluded to)

11:27-28 *And these **are** the generations of Terah: Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. And Haran died in the presence of Terah his father, in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans.*

A new section begins with "the generations of Terah." From here on, Genesis is mostly about Abram and his family.

Haran, Abram's brother, died young, "in the presence of Terah his father." Lot was Haran's son. That helps explain why Lot traveled with Abram later. He had lost his father, and his uncle seems to have looked after him.

"Ur of the Chaldeans" was most likely the great city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia, near the Euphrates River. It was wealthy and advanced, and its people worshiped the moon god. The Chaldeans are best known from later times, so the name may have been used to tell later readers which Ur was meant, much as Dan is used for Laish in 14:14. Joshua 24:2 tells us Terah's family "served other gods" there. Abram did not come from a godly home. God called him out of idolatry by grace.

11:29-30 *And Abram and Nahor took wives for themselves. The name of the wife of Abram **was** Sarai, and the name of the wife of Nahor **was** Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and the father of Iscah. And Sarai was barren; she had no child.*

Abram married Sarai. Later we learn she was his half sister, the daughter of his father but not his mother (20:12). That kind of marriage was later forbidden in the Law of Moses (Leviticus 18:9), but it was not yet forbidden in Abram's day.

Nahor married Milcah, his niece. Milcah matters later, because she becomes the grandmother of Rebekah, Isaac's wife (22:20-23).

"Sarai was barren; she had no child." Moses says it twice so we will not miss it. In that world, a woman without children often felt shame, and a family without an heir had no future. Yet God is about to promise this couple a great nation. He often begins His greatest works where human strength runs out, so that everyone can see it was Him.

A word to anyone who has longed for a child and not received one. Sarai, and later Rebekah and Rachel, were part of God's unique plan to bring the promised line, and in time the Savior, into the world. Genesis tells their stories to show that this line was God's doing. Their stories are not a promise that every couple who prays will have a child. Many faithful believers never do. Childlessness is not a sign that God is angry with you or that your faith is too small. The God who saw Hagar (16:13) sees you, and your worth in His eyes does not depend on children.

11:31-32 *And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, the wife of Abram his son; and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came as far as Haran, and they dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.*

Terah led the family out of Ur "to go to the land of Canaan." Stephen tells us God first appeared to Abram while he was still in Mesopotamia, before they lived in Haran (Acts 7:2-4). So the move began with God's call to Abram, even though Terah is named as the leader.

But "they came as far as Haran, and they dwelt there." Haran was a city far to the north, in what is now southern Turkey, and it was another center of moon worship. The family stopped halfway. Many of us know what that is like: we start to follow God and then settle somewhere comfortable short of where He told us to go.

Terah died in Haran at 205. The next chapter picks up the story with God's call to Abram.

New Testament links: Acts 7:4 (alluded to)

Chapter 11 Summary

After the flood, all people spoke one language. Instead of filling the earth as God commanded, they settled in Shinar and built a city and a tower to make a name for themselves and avoid being scattered. The LORD came down, confused their language, and scattered them over the whole earth, and the place was called Babel. Moses then traced the line of Shem through ten generations, from Shem to Abram, showing how God preserved the line of promise. Terah had three sons, Abram, Nahor and Haran. Haran died in Ur, leaving his son Lot. Abram married Sarai, who was barren. Terah took the family out of Ur toward Canaan, but they settled in Haran, and Terah died there.

People and Places

- Shinar: the plain of southern Mesopotamia, later called Babylonia, in modern Iraq.
- Babel: the city where God confused the languages; later known as Babylon.
- Terah: the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.
- Ur of the Chaldeans: Abram's birthplace, most likely the city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia.
- Haran: a city in northern Mesopotamia where Terah's family settled; also the name of Abram's brother.
- Sarai: Abram's wife, later renamed Sarah.
- Lot: Abram's nephew, the son of Haran.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. The people of Babel were united and spoke one language (11:1, 6). Why do you think their unity turned into rebellion instead of blessing?

2. What were the three goals of the people who built the tower? (11:4)

3. How had their plan gone against God's command in 9:1?

4. Why do you think God chose to confuse and scatter the builders rather than destroy them? (11:5-8)

5. What does the name Babel mean, and how does Babylon show up later in the Bible? (11:9)

6. Lists of names like 11:10-26 can feel dry. What do they show about God's faithfulness to His promises?

7. What do we learn about Sarai in 11:30, and why does it matter for the rest of the story?

8. Where did Terah's family plan to go, and where did they stop? (11:31)

9. In what ways do people today try to make a name for themselves without God? Are you tempted to do that?

10. Is there a place where you started to follow God and then settled short of where He was leading you? What would it take to move on?

Chapter 12: The Call of Abram

Scripture

12:1-9 And the LORD said to Abram, "Go for yourself from your land and from your kindred and from the house of your father, to the land which I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great; and be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who disdains you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." And Abram went, just as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram ***was*** a son of seventy-five years when he went out from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot the son of his brother, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the souls whom they had acquired in Haran; and they went out to go to the land of Canaan, and they came to the land of Canaan. And Abram passed through the land as far as the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth of Moreh. And the Canaanite ***was*** then in the land. And the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your seed I will give this land." And he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. And he moved on from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent, Bethel ***being*** on the west and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar to the LORD, and he called on the name of the LORD. And Abram journeyed, going on and journeying toward the Negeb.

12:10-20 And ***there*** was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine ***was*** heavy in the land. And it happened, as he drew near to enter Egypt, and he said to Sarai his wife, "Look, please, I know that you ***are*** a woman beautiful of appearance. And it will be, when the Egyptians see you, and they will say, 'This ***is*** his wife,' and they will kill me, and you they will keep alive. Please say ***that*** you ***are*** my sister, so that it may go well for me for your sake, and my soul will live on account of you." And it happened, when Abram entered Egypt, and the Egyptians saw the woman, that she ***was*** very beautiful. And the officials of Pharaoh saw her, and they praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken ***to*** the house of Pharaoh. And he did good to Abram for her sake; and he had sheep and cattle and ***male*** donkeys and ***male*** servants and female servants and female donkeys and camels. And the LORD plagued Pharaoh ***with*** great plagues, and his house, on account of Sarai, the wife of Abram. And Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What ***is*** this ***that*** you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she ***is*** your wife? Why did you say, 'She ***is*** my sister,' and I took her for myself as a wife? And now, look, your wife; take ***her*** and go." And Pharaoh commanded men concerning him, and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.

Chapter 12 Preview

Chapter 12 is one of the great turning points in the Bible. For eleven chapters, Genesis has told the story of the whole human race, and it has been a story of sin spreading and judgment falling. Now God speaks to one man, Abram, and calls him to leave his country and his family and go to a land God will show him. God promises to make him a great nation, to bless him, and to bless all the families of the earth through him. The rest of the Bible flows out of this promise.

Abram obeys and comes into Canaan, and God promises to give the land to his descendants. Abram builds altars and calls on the name of the LORD. But when famine comes, he goes down to Egypt and, out of fear, tells Sarai to say she is his sister. Pharaoh takes her into his house. God steps in to protect her and His promise, and Abram is sent away, rebuked by a pagan king.

Chapter 12 Study

12:1 *And the LORD said to Abram, "Go for yourself from your land and from your kindred and from the house of your father, to the land which I will show you.*

"And the LORD said to Abram." Abram did not go looking for God. God came to him. That is how salvation always begins. Abram came from a family that worshiped idols (Joshua 24:2), and God called him by grace.

The call had three parts, each harder than the one before: leave "your land," leave "your kindred," and leave "the house of your father." In that culture, your family was your safety, your income and your identity. God asked Abram to walk away from all of it.

And God did not even give him the address. Abram was to go "to the land which I will show you." Hebrews 11:8 says Abram went out "not knowing where he was going." Faith often means taking the next step God shows us before we see the whole road. God usually gives us enough light for today.

Stephen quotes this call in Acts 7:3: "Go out from your land and from your kindred, and come into a land which I will show you." God spoke first, and Abram's journey followed.

New Testament links: Acts 7:3 (quoted); Hebrews 11:8 (alluded to)

12:2 *And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great; and be a blessing.*

God answered every loss with a promise. Abram left his country, and God said, "I will make you into a great nation." He left his relatives, and God said, "I will bless you." He left his father's house and its name, and God said He would "make your name great."

Remember what Abram and Sarai did not have: a child (11:30). How do you make a great nation from a couple who cannot have even one baby? Only God could do it, and that was the point.

Compare the builders of Babel, who said, "make for ourselves a name" (11:4). They tried to grab greatness and were scattered. Abram received greatness as a gift. Four thousand years later, his name is honored by Jews, Christians and many others around the world. God kept His word.

"And be a blessing." God never blesses us only for ourselves. He blesses us so we can be a blessing to others.

12:3 *And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who disdains you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

God's promise now reaches beyond Abram. "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who disdains you I will curse." God tied His own honor to Abram and his family. I believe this still applies to how nations treat Abram's descendants, the people of Israel. Many Christians see this at work in history, though we should be careful about claiming to know exactly how God has judged any nation.

Then comes the heart of it: "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Babel had scattered the families of the earth. God's answer was to bless them all through one man's family.

How would that happen? Paul tells us. Galatians 3:8 says that in this verse God "preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham." And Galatians 3:16 says the promised blessing comes through Abraham's Seed, "who is Christ." Jesus, a son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1), is the one through whom people from every nation are blessed with forgiveness and new life. If you are not Jewish (a Gentile) and you believe in Jesus, you are part of the answer to this promise. Abraham's blessing reached you through his Seed.

These verses begin what we call the Abrahamic covenant. Like God's covenant with Noah (6:18; 9:11), it rests on God's word alone, not on Abram's performance. God says "I will" over and over. The covenant is spelled out more fully in chapters 15, 17 and 22.

Peter quotes this promise in Acts 3:25 and tells the people of Israel, "You are sons of the prophets and of the covenant." He wanted them to know the blessing came to them first, through Jesus.

New Testament links: Galatians 3:8 (quoted); Acts 3:25 (quoted)

12:4-5 *And Abram went, just as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram **was** a son of seventy-five years when he went out from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot the son of his brother, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the souls whom they had acquired in Haran; and they went out to go to the land of Canaan, and they came to the land of Canaan.*

"And Abram went, just as the LORD had spoken to him." He obeyed without arguing. Faith is shown by what we do.

Abram was seventy-five. God's call does not retire people. Some of the greatest chapters of his life were still ahead of him.

He brought Sarai, his nephew Lot, and "all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the souls whom they had acquired in Haran." These were servants and workers, a large household. Some Jewish teachers have also seen in this phrase people Abram had brought to know the true God, but the plain meaning is his servants. He traveled hundreds of miles south and "came to the land of Canaan."

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:8 (alluded to)

12:6 *And Abram passed through the land as far as the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth of Moreh. And the Canaanite **was** then in the land.*

Shechem was in the middle of the land, between two mountains, about thirty miles north of Jerusalem. "The terebinth of Moreh" was a well-known great tree there. Moreh means "teacher," and it may have been a place where pagans sought guidance.

"The Canaanite was then in the land." Moses tells us this to show that the land was already full of people. God had promised the land to Abram, but someone else lived on it. Faith has to trust God's promise when circumstances seem to say the opposite.

12:7 *And the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your seed I will give this land." And he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.*

"The LORD appeared to Abram." For the first time, Genesis says God appeared to someone in a visible way. We aren't told what Abram saw.

God made a new promise: "To your seed I will give this land." Abram had the promise of a nation. Now he had the promise of a homeland for that nation. The land is a big part of God's covenant with Abraham, and it is repeated many times (13:15; 15:18; 17:8). God gave it to Abram's descendants "forever" (13:15). Paul says that the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29). I believe that includes the land God swore to Abraham, so His promise of this land to Israel still stands.

Abram's answer was worship. He "built there an altar to the LORD." An altar was a place of sacrifice and prayer. It was also a public statement in a pagan land: this ground belongs to the LORD.

New Testament links: Acts 7:5 (alluded to)

12:8-9 *And he moved on from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent, Bethel **being** on the west and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar to the LORD, and he called on the name of the LORD. And Abram journeyed, going on and journeying toward the Negeb.*

Abram moved south to the hills between Bethel and Ai, pitched his tent, and built another altar. Wherever Abram went, he did two things: he pitched a tent and he built an altar. The tent showed he was a traveler who did not settle down. The altar showed whom he lived for. Hebrews 11:9-10 says he lived in tents because he was looking for a city whose builder is God.

He "called on the name of the LORD." To call on God's name means to pray to Him and worship Him publicly by name. Abram did this out in the open, among the Canaanites.

Then he "journeyed, going on and journeying toward the Negeb." The Negeb (today usually spelled Negev) is the dry southern region of Israel.

12:10 *And **there** was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine **was** heavy in the land.*

Right after Abram obeyed God, a famine came. Obeying God does not mean life will be easy. Sometimes the test comes right after the step of faith.

"And Abram went down to Egypt." Egypt had the Nile River and often had food when Canaan did not. We aren't told that God sent him, and Abram does not seem to have asked. He built no altars in Egypt. Many teachers see this as a step out of faith and into his own planning. It did not go well.

12:11-13 *And it happened, as he drew near to enter Egypt, and he said to Sarai his wife, "Look, please, I know that you **are** a woman beautiful of appearance. And it will be, when the Egyptians see you, and they will say, 'This **is** his wife,' and they will kill me, and you they will keep alive. Please say **that** you **are** my sister, so that it may go well for me for your sake, and my soul will live on account of you."*

Abram was afraid. Sarai was beautiful, and he thought the Egyptians would kill him to take her. So he asked her to say she was his sister.

It was a half-truth. Sarai really was his half sister (20:12). But a half-truth told to deceive is a lie. Abram's plan protected him and put his wife in danger. The man who trusted God enough to leave his home did not trust God to protect him in Egypt.

That is a warning for us. Strong faith in one area does not mean strong faith in every area. Old fears can still trip up mature believers. Abram will repeat this same sin in chapter 20, and his son Isaac will do it too (26:7). Our sins often get passed down to our children.

12:14-16 *And it happened, when Abram entered Egypt, and the Egyptians saw the woman, that she **was** very beautiful. And the officials of Pharaoh saw her, and they praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken **to** the house of Pharaoh. And he did good to Abram for her sake; and he had sheep and cattle and **male** donkeys and **male** servants and female servants and female donkeys and camels.*

Abram's fear came true, but not the way he expected. Pharaoh's officials praised Sarai to Pharaoh, and she "was taken to the house of Pharaoh" to become one of his wives. Pharaoh was the title of the king of Egypt, not his personal name.

Pharaoh gave Abram sheep, oxen, donkeys, servants and camels. Abram got rich, and he lost his wife. Some of that wealth may have caused trouble later. Hagar, the Egyptian maid in chapter 16, may have come from this trip. Gains won by sin often bring a hidden cost.

12:17 *And the LORD plagued Pharaoh **with** great plagues, and his house, on account of Sarai, the wife of Abram.*

"And the LORD plagued Pharaoh with great plagues, and his house, on account of Sarai, the wife of Abram." Abram failed, but God did not. God had promised a son through Sarai, and He was not going to let that promise be lost in Pharaoh's palace.

God's faithfulness does not depend on ours. Paul says that if we are faithless, He remains faithful (2 Timothy 2:13). That doesn't excuse sin, but it comforts anyone who has failed.

These plagues are a preview of the ones God will send on Egypt in the days of Moses to set Abram's descendants free.

12:18-20 *And Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What **is** this **that** you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she **is** your wife? Why did you say, 'She **is** my sister,' and I took her for myself as a wife? And now, look, your wife; take **her** and go." And Pharaoh commanded men concerning him, and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.*

Pharaoh's questions are sharp: "What is this that you have done to me?" The pagan king acts with more honor than the man of God. It is a sad thing when unbelievers have to correct believers about honesty.

Abram has no answer. Scripture records none. Pharaoh gives Sarai back and sends them away. Abram leaves Egypt richer, but humbled, and the next chapter will bring him back to the altar he left behind.

Genesis does not hide the failures of its heroes. Abram is called the friend of God (James 2:23), but he was a real man with real weaknesses. That should encourage us. God does not use perfect people. He uses forgiven people who keep coming back to Him.

Chapter 12 Summary

The LORD called Abram to leave his country, his relatives and his father's house and go to a land God would show him. God promised to make him a great nation, to bless him, to make his name great, and to bless all the families of the earth through him, a promise fulfilled in Christ. At seventy-five, Abram obeyed and came to Canaan with Sarai and Lot. At Shechem the LORD appeared to him and promised the land to his descendants, and Abram built altars and called on the name of the LORD. When a famine came, Abram went down to Egypt and, out of fear, had Sarai say she was his sister. She was taken into Pharaoh's house, but the LORD struck Pharaoh with plagues. Pharaoh rebuked Abram and sent him away with his wife and possessions.

People and Places

- Canaan: the land God promised to Abram, roughly modern Israel and the area around it.
- Shechem: a town in the central hill country of Canaan.
- Bethel and Ai: two towns north of Jerusalem.
- Negeb: the dry southern region of Canaan (today usually spelled Negev).
- Pharaoh: the title of the king of Egypt.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. What three things did God tell Abram to leave behind? (12:1)

2. What did God promise Abram in 12:2-3?

3. According to Galatians 3:8 and 3:16, how is 12:3 fulfilled?

4. Abram was seventy-five when he left Haran (12:4). What does that say to someone who thinks their best years for serving God are behind them?

5. What new promise did God give at Shechem, and how did Abram respond? (12:7)

6. Wherever Abram went, he pitched a tent and built an altar (12:7-8). What do those two things say about how he saw his life?

7. Why did Abram go to Egypt, and what did he ask Sarai to say? (12:10-13)

8. God protected Sarai, and Pharaoh, a pagan king, had to correct Abram (12:17-19). What does this show about God's faithfulness when His people fail?

9. Abram stepped out in faith and then gave in to fear. Where are you strong in faith, and where are you most tempted to fear?

10. God blessed Abram so he could be a blessing. How has God blessed you, and how could you pass that blessing on this week?

Chapter 13: Abram and Lot Part Ways

Scripture

13:1-7 And Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the Negeb. And Abram ***was*** very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journeys from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there at the first; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD. And Lot also, who ***was*** going with Abram, had sheep and cattle and tents. And the land did not support them to dwell together, for their possessions were great, and they were not able to dwell together. And ***there*** was a quarrel between the herdsmen of the livestock of Abram and the herdsmen of the livestock of Lot. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite ***were*** then dwelling in the land.

13:8-13 And Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we ***are*** men, brothers. Is not all the land before you? Please separate from me. If the left, then I will go right; and if the right, then I will go left." And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the district of the Jordan, that all of it ***was*** well-watered, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as you go to Zoar. And Lot chose for himself all the district of the Jordan, and Lot set out toward the east; and they separated, each from his brother. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the district, and he moved ***his*** tent as far as Sodom. And the men of Sodom ***were*** evil and sinners against the LORD, exceedingly.

13:14-18 And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Please lift up your eyes and look from the place where you ***are***, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you are seeing, to you I will give it, and to your seed forever. And I will make your seed like the dust of the earth, so that if a man is able to count the dust of the earth, your seed also can be counted. Arise, walk about in the land, through its length and through its breadth, for to you I will give it." And Abram moved ***his*** tent, and he came and dwelt by the terebinths of Mamre, which ***are*** in Hebron; and he built there an altar to the LORD.

Chapter 13 Preview

Abram comes back from Egypt and goes straight back to the altar he built between Bethel and Ai. There he calls on the name of the LORD again. But God has blessed both Abram and his nephew Lot with so many animals that the land cannot hold them both, and their herdsmen start to fight.

Abram, the older man, lets Lot choose first. Lot looks at the well-watered Jordan valley and picks it, moving his tents toward Sodom, a city full of wicked men. After Lot leaves, God tells Abram to look in every direction, because all the land he sees will belong to him and his descendants forever, and his descendants will be as many as the dust of the earth.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1-2 *And Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the Negeb. And Abram **was** very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.*

Abram "went up from Egypt." In the Bible you go "down" to Egypt and "up" to the land of promise. That is partly geography, since Canaan's hill country is higher, but it is also a picture. Leaving Egypt was a step back up spiritually.

"Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold." In that world, wealth was counted mostly in animals. God had blessed Abram in spite of his failure in Egypt. Riches are not a sin, but they bring their own tests, and this chapter shows one of them.

13:3-4 *And he went on his journeys from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there at the first; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.*

Abram went back "to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai," to "the place of the altar which he had made there at the first." He did not try to start fresh somewhere new. He went back to the last place he had walked closely with God.

That is how you recover after failing. You go back to where you left the path. You come back to God, confess where you went wrong, and pick up again in worship and prayer. "There Abram called on the name of the LORD." After the silence of Egypt, Abram is worshiping again.

13:5-7 *And Lot also, who **was** going with Abram, had sheep and cattle and tents. And the land did not support them to dwell together, for their possessions were great, and they were not able to dwell together. And **there** was a quarrel between the herdsmen of the livestock of Abram and the herdsmen of the livestock of Lot. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite **were** then dwelling in the land.*

Lot had grown rich too, from traveling with Abram. Now there was not enough grass and water for both of their herds. "There was a quarrel between the herdsmen." This was the kind of quarreling that spoils relationships.

Moses adds, "and the Canaanite and the Perizzite were then dwelling in the land." The pagan neighbors were watching. When God's people fight over money and property, the world sees it. That was true then, and it is true in churches and Christian families today (1 Corinthians 6:1-8).

Problems of plenty can be as hard as problems of want. Many families have been split, not by poverty, but by fights over an inheritance.

13:8-9 *And Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we **are** men, brothers. Is not all the land before you? Please separate from me. If the left, then I will go right; and if the right, then I will go left."*

Abram stepped in to make peace. "Please let there be no strife between me and you," he said, "for we are men, brothers." He was really Lot's uncle. The word "brothers" was used for close relatives. He was reminding Lot that they were family, and family should not fight.

Then Abram did something remarkable. As the older man and the head of the family, he had every right to choose first. Instead, he let Lot choose. "Is not all the land before you?"

Abram could be generous because he trusted God. God had promised him the whole land. He did not need to grab the best piece. When you know God is taking care of you, you can let others go first. Paul says to regard one another as more important than yourselves (Philippians 2:3). Abram lived that out long before Paul wrote it.

13:10-11 *And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the district of the Jordan, that all of it **was** well-watered, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as you go to Zoar. And Lot chose for himself all the district of the Jordan, and Lot set out toward the east; and they separated, each from his brother.*

"Lot lifted up his eyes and saw." He looked at the Jordan valley, and it was "well watered," like "the garden of the LORD," like Egypt. It looked like paradise. It looked like the best deal.

Lot chose by sight. He looked at the grass and the water and the profit. We read nothing about Lot praying or thinking about what kind of place it was for his family's soul. Moses adds a sad note: "before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah." What looked like paradise was headed for judgment.

Lot also "set out toward the east." In Genesis, moving east is often a move away from God: Adam and Eve were sent out to the east of Eden, and Cain settled east of Eden. Lot is heading the wrong way.

13:12-13 *Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the district, and he moved **his** tent as far as Sodom. And the men of Sodom **were** evil and sinners against the LORD, exceedingly.*

Two men, two directions. "Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan," the land of promise. Lot "moved his tent as far as Sodom."

Watch Lot's steps. First he looked toward Sodom. Then he chose the valley. Then he pitched his tents near Sodom. By the next chapter, he is "dwelling in Sodom" (14:12). By chapter 19, he is sitting in its gate as a city leader. Spiritual drift usually happens one small step at a time.

"The men of Sodom were evil and sinners against the LORD." Lot knew, or should have known. He chose the place anyway. Peter later calls Lot a righteous man who was tormented day after day by what he saw there (2 Peter 2:7-8). He was saved, but he paid a high price, and so did his family.

New Testament links: 2 Peter 2:8 (alluded to)

13:14-15 *And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Please lift up your eyes and look from the place where you **are**, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you are seeing, to you I will give it, and to your seed forever.*

God spoke to Abram "after Lot had separated from him." Abram had just given up the best land. Now God showed him what he had really been given.

"Lift up your eyes." Lot had lifted up his eyes too, and he looked at what he wanted. Abram lifted up his eyes at God's command, and he saw what God was giving him. "For all the land which you are seeing, to you I will give it, and to your seed forever."

That word "forever" matters. God gave the land to Abram's family as an everlasting possession, and, as we saw at 12:7, I believe that promise still stands.

Paul builds on the words "And to your seed" in Galatians 3:16, where he says the one Seed is "Christ." Some teachers take this to mean the land promise is now fulfilled in Christ and His people in a spiritual way. I read it plainly: Christ is the Seed through whom every promise to Abraham comes true, and when He reigns on the earth, Israel will possess this land.

New Testament links: Galatians 3:16 (quoted)

13:16-17 *And I will make your seed like the dust of the earth, so that if a man is able to count the dust of the earth, your seed also can be counted. Arise, walk about in the land, through its length and through its breadth, for to you I will give it."*

"I will make your seed like the dust of the earth." Abram still had no child at all. God promised him more descendants than anyone could count. Later God will use the stars (15:5) and the sand of the seashore (22:17) for the same promise.

"Arise, walk about in the land, through its length and through its breadth." Walking over land may have been a way of claiming it in that world, and many teachers read the command that way. God was telling Abram to walk through the land as its owner, even though he did not yet hold a single acre. Stephen says Abraham never received even a foot of it in his lifetime (Acts 7:5). He walked by faith in what God had said.

We are called to live the same way, trusting what God has promised even before we see it.

13:18 *And Abram moved **his** tent, and he came and dwelt by the terebinths of Mamre, which **are** in Hebron; and he built there an altar to the LORD.*

Abram moved to "the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron." Hebron is about twenty miles south of Jerusalem, in the hill country. It became Abram's main home. He, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah would all be buried near there (23:19; 49:29-31).

At Hebron "he built there an altar to the LORD." Lot moved toward Sodom. Abram moved to an altar. The chapter ends with Abram where he belongs: in the land, living in a tent, and worshiping God. That is a good picture of the believer's life. We live as travelers here, and our hearts are set on God.

Chapter 13 Summary

Abram left Egypt a rich man and returned to the altar between Bethel and Ai, where he called on the name of the LORD. Because Abram and Lot both had so many animals, the land could not support them together, and their herdsmen quarreled. Abram let Lot choose first. Lot chose the well-watered Jordan valley and moved his tents as far as Sodom, a city of very wicked men. After Lot left, the LORD told Abram to look in every direction, because He would give all the land Abram could see to him and his descendants forever and make his descendants as many as the dust of the earth. Abram moved to the terebinths of Mamre at Hebron and built an altar to the LORD.

People and Places

- Hebron: a town in the hill country about twenty miles south of Jerusalem; Abraham's main home.
- Terebinths of Mamre: a grove of great trees at Hebron, named for Mamre the Amorite (14:13).

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. Where did Abram go after he left Egypt, and what did he do there? (13:3-4)

2. God had blessed both Abram and Lot, yet their wealth caused strife (13:5-7). Why can plenty be as hard to handle as want?

3. What did Abram offer Lot, and why was that generous? (13:8-9)

4. Lot chose the valley because it looked like the garden of the LORD (13:10). What was missing from the way he made his choice?

5. Lot knew, or should have known, what the men of Sodom were like (13:13). Why do you think he moved toward their city anyway?

6. What did God promise Abram after Lot left? (13:14-17)

7. Where did Abram settle at the end of the chapter, and what did he build there? (13:18)

8. How do you see Lot drifting step by step toward Sodom in chapters 13 and 14?

9. Lot chose by what looked best. What helps you make choices by faith instead of by sight?

10. Is there a conflict in your family or church where you could choose, like Abram, to let the other person go first?

Chapter 14: Abram Rescues Lot and Meets Melchizedek

Scripture

14:1-12 And it happened in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, ***that*** they made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that ***is*** Zoar. All these joined together at the Valley of Siddim, that ***is*** the Salt Sea. Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and ***in*** the thirteenth year they rebelled. And in the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer came, and the kings who ***were*** with him, and they struck the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, and the Zuzim in Ham, and the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, and the Horites in their mountain Seir, as far as El-paran, which ***is*** by the wilderness. And they turned back and came to En-mishpat, that ***is*** Kadesh, and they struck all the country of the Amalekite, and also the Amorite who ***was*** dwelling in Hazazon-tamar. And the king of Sodom went out, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that ***is*** Zoar; and they arranged battle with them in the Valley of Siddim, with Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings with the five. And the Valley of Siddim ***was*** pits, pits of bitumen; and the king of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell there; and those who remained fled to ***the*** mountain. And they took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their food, and they went. And they took Lot and his possessions, the son of the brother of Abram, and they went; and he ***was*** dwelling in Sodom.

14:13-16 And the one who escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew; and he ***was*** dwelling by the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite, the brother of Eshcol and the brother of Aner; and they ***were*** covenant partners of Abram. And Abram heard that his brother had been taken captive, and he drew out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and he pursued as far as Dan. And he divided himself against them by night, he and his servants, and he struck them, and he pursued them as far as Hobah, which ***is*** north of Damascus. And he brought back all the possessions, and also Lot his brother and his possessions he brought back, and also the women and the people.

14:17-24 And the king of Sodom went out to meet him, after his return from striking Chedorlaomer and the kings who ***were*** with him, to the Valley of Shaveh, that ***is*** the Valley of the King. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; and he ***was*** a priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, "Blessed ***be*** Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed ***be*** God Most High, who has delivered your adversaries into your hand." And he gave him a tenth of everything. And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the souls, and the possessions take for yourself." And Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted up my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that from a thread even to a sandal strap, I will not take anything of all that ***is*** yours, and you will not say, 'I ***myself*** made Abram rich'; apart from me, only that which the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share."

Chapter 14 Preview

Chapter 14 opens like a page from an ancient history book. Four kings from the east march against five kings of the cities near the Dead Sea, including Sodom. The eastern kings win, plunder Sodom, and carry off its people. Lot, who is now living in Sodom, is taken captive with everything he owns.

When Abram hears, he gathers 318 trained men from his household, chases the invaders far to the north, attacks at night, and brings back Lot, the people and the goods. On the way home he meets two kings. Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High, blesses him with bread and wine, and Abram gives him a tenth of everything. The king of Sodom offers him the spoils, and Abram refuses to take even a thread, so that no one but God can say they made him rich.

Chapter 14 Study

14:1-4 *And it happened in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, **that** they made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that **is** Zoar. All these joined together at the Valley of Siddim, that **is** the Salt Sea. Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and **in** the thirteenth year they rebelled.*

Four kings from the east formed an alliance. Shinar is Babylonia, and Elam was a kingdom east of it, in what is now southwest Iran. Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, seems to have been the leader. Scholars have tried to match these kings with names in ancient records, but no match is certain.

The five kings ruled cities in the area of the Dead Sea, most often placed near its southern end. Moses calls the Dead Sea "the Salt Sea." They had served Chedorlaomer, paying him tribute, which is money or goods paid to a stronger king, for twelve years. In the thirteenth year they rebelled.

Moses gives real names and real places. He writes this as history, in a world of kings and wars and treaties.

14:5-7 *And in the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer came, and the kings who **were** with him, and they struck the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, and the Zuzim in Ham, and the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, and the Horites in their mountain Seir, as far as El-paran, which **is** by the wilderness. And they turned back and came to En-mishpat, that **is** Kadesh, and they struck all the country of the Amalekite, and also the Amorite who **was** dwelling in Hazazon-tamar.*

The eastern kings came down the east side of the Jordan and around the south, defeating one people after another. The Rephaim, Zuzim and Emim were peoples known for being tall and strong (Deuteronomy 2:10-11, 20-21). The Horites lived in Mount Seir, the land later held by Esau's descendants. The army swept around to Kadesh and through the lands of the Amalekites and Amorites.

This was a powerful army that had beaten giants. That makes Abram's victory later in the chapter even more striking.

14:8-10 *And the king of Sodom went out, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that **is** Zoar; and they arranged battle with them in the Valley of Siddim, with Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings with the five. And the Valley of Siddim **was** pits, pits of bitumen; and the king of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell there; and those who remained fled to **the** mountain.*

The five kings came out to fight in the valley of Siddim. "Four kings with the five," and the four won.

The valley "was pits, pits of bitumen," that is, natural asphalt. The Dead Sea is still known for lumps of asphalt that float up to its surface. As the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, they fell into them. Others ran for the hills. The Hebrew word for "bitumen" here is the same as in 11:3 at Babel. Moses may want us to connect the two places as centers of human pride.

14:11-12 *And they took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their food, and they went. And they took Lot and his possessions, the son of the brother of Abram, and they went; and he **was** dwelling in Sodom.*

The invaders took the goods and food of Sodom and Gomorrah and left. "They took Lot and his possessions, the son of the brother of Abram," because "he was dwelling in Sodom."

In chapter 13, Lot pitched his tents near Sodom (13:12). Now he is "dwelling in Sodom." He moved from the edge to the middle. And when judgment fell on Sodom, it fell on Lot too. When we make our home among the world's ways, we often share in the world's troubles. Lot chose Sodom for its riches, and now he had lost them all.

14:13 *And the one who escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew; and he **was** dwelling by the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite, the brother of Eshcol and the brother of Aner; and they **were** covenant partners of Abram.*

"And the one who escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew." The word "Hebrew" appears here for the first time in the Bible. It may come from Eber, Abram's ancestor (10:21; 11:14-17), or from a word meaning one who crossed over, since Abram had crossed the Euphrates. Either way, it marks Abram as an outsider in Canaan.

Abram was living by "the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite." Mamre and his brothers Eshcol and Aner were "covenant partners of Abram." Abram did not shut himself off from his neighbors. He lived at peace with them and had treaties with them, while still worshiping only the LORD.

14:14 *And Abram heard that his brother had been taken captive, and he drew out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and he pursued as far as Dan.*

"Abram heard that his brother had been taken captive, and he drew out his trained men." Lot had chosen the best land and left his uncle behind. Abram could have said Lot made his own choice. Instead he went after him. Abram did not hold Lot's choice against him.

Abram had 318 "trained men, born in his house." That gives us a sense of how large his household was. With women and children, it may have been well over a thousand people. These men were trained to fight. Abram was a peaceful man, but he was not helpless.

He chased the enemy "as far as Dan," in the far north of the land. The town was called Laish in Abram's day and was renamed Dan much later (Judges 18:29). Moses or a later inspired editor used the name readers would know.

14:15-16 *And he divided himself against them by night, he and his servants, and he struck them, and he pursued them as far as Hobah, which **is** north of Damascus. And he brought back all the possessions, and also Lot his brother and his possessions he brought back, and also the women and the people.*

Abram used wisdom. "He divided himself against them by night, he and his servants," attacking from more than one side in the dark. He chased them past Damascus.

"He brought back all the possessions, and also Lot his brother and his possessions he brought back." The army that had beaten giants was beaten by a shepherd and his household. Melchizedek will tell us why in verse 20: God delivered them into Abram's hand.

Abram fought to rescue, not to conquer. He did not take Sodom's land or set himself up as king. He just brought everyone home.

14:17 *And the king of Sodom went out to meet him, after his return from striking Chedorlaomer and the kings who **were** with him, to the Valley of Shaveh, that **is** the Valley of the King.*

The king of Sodom came out to meet Abram at "the Valley of Shaveh, that is the Valley of the King." Many think this was near Jerusalem (2 Samuel 18:18).

Two kings come to Abram in the next few verses, and they offer him two very different things. The king of Sodom will offer the riches of this world. The king of Salem will offer the blessing of God. Before the king of Sodom can speak, Melchizedek steps in.

14:18 *And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; and he **was** a priest of God Most High.*

"Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; and he was a priest of God Most High." He appears suddenly and leaves just as suddenly. His name means "king of righteousness," and Salem means "peace" (Hebrews 7:2). Salem is most likely the early name of Jerusalem (Psalm 76:2).

He was both a king and a priest. A priest stands between God and people, offering sacrifices and prayers. Later in Israel, the kings of David's line came from Judah and the priests from Levi. No king of Israel was allowed to be a priest too. But Melchizedek was both.

"God Most High" is El Elyon in Hebrew. Even in pagan Canaan, God had a priest who knew and worshiped the true God. God was at work in places Abram did not expect.

Some have connected the bread and wine with the Lord's Supper (Communion). The New Testament does not make that connection, so I would not press it. It was a meal of welcome and refreshment for tired soldiers.

New Testament links: Hebrews 7:1-2 (pictured)

14:19-20 *And he blessed him and said, "Blessed **be** Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed **be** God Most High, who has delivered your adversaries into your hand." And he gave him a tenth of everything.*

Melchizedek blessed Abram by "God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth." Then he blessed God, "Who has delivered your adversaries into your hand." He gave the credit for the victory to God, where it belonged.

"And he gave him a tenth of everything." Abram gave Melchizedek a tithe. A tithe is a tenth of one's income or goods, given to God. Here we meet the first tithe in the Bible, hundreds of years before the Law of Moses required one. Abram gave out of thankfulness to God.

Why does Melchizedek matter so much? Because David and the writer of Hebrews tell us. Psalm 110:4 says the coming Messiah would be "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Hebrews 7 explains that Jesus is that priest. Like Melchizedek, Jesus is both King and Priest. Melchizedek appears in Genesis with no record of his father, mother, birth or death, and Hebrews 7:3 says that in this way he was "like the Son of God." The better one blesses the lesser (Hebrews 7:7), so Melchizedek was greater than Abram, and Jesus' priesthood is greater than the priesthood of Levi, who came from Abram.

Some believe Melchizedek was the Son of God Himself appearing before His birth. Most teachers believe he was a real human king whom God used as a picture of Christ, and I believe that reading fits Hebrews best.

New Testament links: Hebrews 7:1-2 (pictured); Hebrews 7:7 (alluded to)

14:21 *And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the souls, and the possessions take for yourself."*

"The king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the souls, and the possessions take for yourself.'" It sounded generous. As the victor, Abram had a claim to the spoils, and the king of Sodom was offering him a fortune.

But compare the two kings. Melchizedek gave bread and wine and a blessing. The king of Sodom brought nothing and made a deal. One king pointed Abram to God. The other offered him wealth that would tie him to Sodom.

14:22-24 *And Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted up my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that from a thread even to a sandal strap, I will not take anything of all that **is** yours, and you will not say, 'I **myself** made Abram rich'; apart from me, only that which the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share."*

Abram had already made up his mind. "I have lifted up my hand to the LORD, God Most High." Raising the hand was a way of making a solemn promise. Abram uses the same name Melchizedek used, but he adds "the LORD," God's personal name. He is saying that God Most High is the LORD he knows and worships.

He would not take anything, "from a thread even to a sandal strap," not even a shoelace. Why? So that "you will not say, 'I myself made Abram rich.'" Abram wanted it to be clear that every blessing in his life came from God, not from Sodom.

Abram did not force his standard on others. His allies Aner, Eshcol and Mamre could take their share. He made one more exception: what his young men had already eaten. He was strict with himself and fair to others.

Some offers look like blessings but come with strings attached. Before we take what the world offers, it is wise to ask whether it would make us owe something we should not owe. Abram had just met God's priest. He had no need of Sodom's gold.

Chapter 14 Summary

Four kings from the east, led by Chedorlaomer of Elam, defeated the five kings of the cities by the Dead Sea, plundered Sodom and Gomorrah, and took Lot captive, since he was living in Sodom. When Abram the Hebrew heard, he led out his 318 trained men, chased the enemy as far as Dan, attacked by night, and brought back Lot, the people and all the goods. On his return, Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High, brought out bread and wine and blessed Abram, and Abram gave him a tenth of everything. The New Testament shows that Melchizedek was a picture of Christ, our eternal King and Priest. The king of Sodom offered Abram the goods, but Abram refused to take even a thread, so that no one could say anyone but God had made him rich.

People and Places

- Chedorlaomer: king of Elam and leader of the four eastern kings.
- Elam: an ancient kingdom east of Babylonia, in what is now southwest Iran.
- Sodom and Gomorrah: wicked cities near the Dead Sea, traditionally placed near its southern end.
- Salt Sea: the Dead Sea.
- Mamre, Eshcol and Aner: Amorite brothers who were Abram's allies at Hebron.
- Dan: a town in the far north of the land, earlier called Laish.

- Melchizedek: king of Salem and priest of God Most High; Hebrews 7 shows him as a picture of Christ.
- Salem: most likely the early name of Jerusalem.

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. Why do you think Moses gives so many names of kings, peoples and places in 14:1-11? What does that tell us about the kind of account this is?

2. Why was Lot taken captive, and what does that show about his choices? (14:11-12)

3. How many trained men did Abram take, and how did he defeat the enemy? (14:14-15)

4. Abram brought everyone home but did not take Sodom's land or make himself king (14:16). What does that show about the kind of man he was?

5. Who was Melchizedek, and what did he give to Abram? (14:18-19)

6. To whom did Melchizedek give the credit for Abram's victory? (14:20)

7. How do Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews 7 connect Melchizedek with Jesus?

8. Why did Abram refuse to take anything from the king of Sodom? (14:22-23)

9. Lot had treated Abram poorly, yet Abram rescued him. Is there someone you need to help even though they have not been fair to you?

10. Are there offers or opportunities in your life that might tie you to things God does not want you tied to? How can you tell?

Chapter 15: God's Covenant with Abram

Scripture

15:1-6 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram. I ***am*** a shield to you; your reward ***will be*** exceedingly great." And Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, and I ***am*** going childless, and the heir of my house ***is*** Damascus Eliezer?" And Abram said, "Look, to me You have not given seed; and look, a son of my house ***is*** inheriting ***from*** me." And look, the word of the LORD ***came*** to him, saying, "This one will not inherit ***from*** you; but ***one*** who will come out from your inward parts, he will inherit ***from*** you." And He brought him outside and said, "Please look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So will your seed be." And he believed in the LORD, and He counted it to him ***as*** righteousness.

15:7-21 And He said to him, "I ***am*** the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess it." And he said, "Lord GOD, by what will I know that I will possess it?" And He said to him, "Bring Me a heifer three years old, and a female goat three years old, and a ram three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." And he brought Him all these and cut them apart in the middle, and he set each piece to meet its neighbor; and the birds he did not cut apart. And the birds of prey came down on the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. And it happened, as the sun ***was*** going ***down***, and a deep sleep fell on Abram; and look, dread, a great darkness, ***was*** falling on him. And He said to Abram, "You will surely know that your seed will be a sojourner in a land ***that is*** not theirs, and they will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation which they will serve I will judge; and afterward they will come out with great possessions. And you, you will go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried in a good old age. And ***in*** the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite ***is*** not yet complete." And it happened, the sun had gone ***down***, and ***there*** was thick darkness; and look, an oven of smoke and a torch of fire which passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD cut a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your seed I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite, and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim, and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite."

Chapter 15 Preview

After the battle in chapter 14, Abram may be afraid that the eastern kings will come back. He is also getting older, and he still has no son. God comes to him in a vision and says, "Do not fear." Abram pours out his heart: his only heir is a servant. God takes him outside, shows him the stars, and promises that his descendants will be just as many. Abram believes the LORD, and God counts it to him as righteousness. That one verse becomes the foundation of Paul's teaching that we are saved by faith.

Then God confirms His promise of the land with a solemn covenant ceremony. Abram cuts animals in half, and after dark a smoking oven and a flaming torch pass between the pieces. God

alone walks through. God also tells Abram what is coming: his descendants will be slaves in a foreign land for four hundred years, then come out with great possessions and return to Canaan.

Chapter 15 Study

15:1 *After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram. I **am** a shield to you; your reward **will be** exceedingly great."*

"After these things," that is, after the battle and after Abram turned down Sodom's riches. Abram had made enemies of four powerful kings, and he had just said no to a fortune. God's answer speaks to both.

"Do not fear, Abram. I am a shield to you." A shield protects. Abram did not need to fear the eastern kings, because God Himself was his protection. God also promised, "your reward will be exceedingly great." Abram did not need Sodom's goods, because God would reward him far beyond anything the king of Sodom could give.

For the first time in the Bible, God tells someone, "Do not fear." It will not be the last. God says it again and again to His people. When fear comes, His word to us is the same. He is our shield, and He is "a rewarder to those who earnestly seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

15:2-3 *And Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, and I **am** going childless, and the heir of my house **is** Damascus Eliezer?" And Abram said, "Look, to me You have not given seed; and look, a son of my house **is** inheriting **from** me."*

Abram was honest with God. "Lord GOD, what will You give me, and I am going childless?" Here "Lord GOD" stands for two Hebrew names together: Adonai, meaning Master, and Yahweh, God's personal name. Abram speaks to God as his Master, but he does not hide his disappointment.

"The heir of my house is Damascus Eliezer," his chief servant. Some scholars point to ancient Mesopotamian contracts, such as tablets from the town of Nuzi, in which a childless man adopted someone to care for him in old age and inherit his property. How closely they match Abram's case is debated, but Abram seems to have expected his chief servant to be his heir.

God welcomes honest prayer. Abram did not pretend everything was fine. He brought his real questions to God. That kind of honesty is faith talking to God about what it cannot yet see.

15:4-5 *And look, the word of the LORD **came** to him, saying, "This one will not inherit **from** you; but **one** who will come out from your inward parts, he will inherit **from** you." And He brought him outside and said, "Please look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So will your seed be."*

God answered plainly. "This one will not inherit from you; but one who will come out from your inward parts, he will inherit from you." Abram's heir would be his own son.

Then God took Abram outside under the night sky. "Please look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able." Out in the dry country, with no city lights, the sky would have been full of stars. Abram could not count them. "So will your seed be."

God had used the dust of the earth before (13:16). Now He used the stars. From then on, every clear night would remind Abram of God's promise. God often gives us reminders of His word in the ordinary things around us.

Paul quotes "So will your seed be" in Romans 4:18. He says Abraham "against hope believed in hope," and that is what Abram did out under those stars.

New Testament links: Romans 4:18 (quoted)

15:6 *And he believed in the LORD, and He counted it to him **as** righteousness.*

"And he believed in the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness." Few verses in the whole Bible matter more than this one.

"Believed" means Abram trusted God. He took God at His word, even though he was old and Sarai was barren and nothing he could see made the promise look possible. Paul says he did not waver in unbelief but was fully assured that God was able to do what He had promised (Romans 4:20-21).

"Counted" is an accounting word here. It means to credit to someone's account. Abram did not earn righteousness. He did not have it in himself. God credited it to him. Righteousness means being right with God, accepted by Him as just. Abram received that standing by faith.

Paul builds his whole teaching on this verse. In Romans 4:3 he asks, "For what does the Scripture say?" and quotes it: "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness." Paul points out that this happened before Abram was circumcised (Romans 4:10) and hundreds of years before the Law of Moses (Galatians 3:17). So circumcision and the Law were never the way to be right with God. It has always been by grace through faith.

That is good news for us. We are made right with God the same way Abram was. We do not earn it. We believe God's promise, now fulfilled in Jesus, who died for our sins and was raised for our justification, so that God could declare us right with Him (Romans 4:23-25). Paul says those who believe are sons of Abraham (Galatians 3:7). If you have trusted Christ, Genesis 15:6 is your story too.

Paul quotes this verse again in Galatians 3:6, and James quotes it too: "And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness" (James 2:23). James is not arguing with Paul. Paul shows how Abraham was made right with God, and James shows that real faith goes on to obey, as Abraham did on Mount Moriah (James 2:21).

New Testament links: Galatians 3:6 (quoted); James 2:23 (quoted); Romans 4:3 (quoted); Romans 4:22-24 (quoted)

15:7-8 *And He said to him, "I **am** the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess it." And he said, "Lord GOD, by what will I know that I will possess it?"*

"I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans." God reminded Abram that the whole journey had been His doing. God called him out of Ur, and the purpose was "to give you this land to possess."

Abram asked, "By what will I know that I will possess it?" Some think this was doubt. I believe it was a request for assurance, not unbelief, since verse 6 has just told us Abram believed. God did not scold him. He answered with a covenant.

New Testament links: Acts 7:2 (alluded to)

15:9-11 *And He said to him, "Bring Me a heifer three years old, and a female goat three years old, and a ram three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." And he brought Him all these and cut them apart in the middle, and he set each piece to meet its neighbor; and the birds he did not cut apart. And the birds of prey came down on the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.*

God told Abram to bring a heifer, a female goat and a ram, each three years old, and a turtledove and a young pigeon. These were the same kinds of animals later used in Israel's sacrifices. Abram cut the large animals in two and laid the halves opposite each other, making a path between them.

Covenants were sometimes sealed this way. In Jeremiah 34:18-20, the people who made a covenant walked between the two halves of a calf. In doing so they were saying, in effect, may I be cut in pieces like this animal if I break this covenant.

Birds of prey came down on the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. Abram waited and guarded the sacrifice. Waiting on God is often part of receiving His promises.

15:12-14 *And it happened, as the sun **was** going **down**, and a deep sleep fell on Abram; and look, dread, a great darkness, **was** falling on him. And He said to Abram, "You will surely know that your seed will be a sojourner in a land **that is** not theirs, and they will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation which they will serve I will judge; and afterward they will come out with great possessions.*

As the sun went down, a deep sleep fell on Abram, and "look, dread, a great darkness, was falling on him." God was about to show him something heavy.

Abram's descendants would be "a sojourner in a land that is not theirs," and there "they will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years." That land was Egypt. God told Abram ahead of time, so that when it happened, his people would know God had not forgotten them. Four hundred is likely a round number. Exodus 12:40 gives 430 years for Israel's time in Egypt. Some, following Galatians 3:17 and the Greek Old Testament, count those years from Abraham's time instead.

"And also the nation which they will serve I will judge; and afterward they will come out with great possessions." God foretold the plagues on Egypt and the exodus, when Israel left with silver and gold from the Egyptians (Exodus 12:35-36). God's people may suffer, but God will judge their oppressors and bring them out.

Stephen quotes these words in Acts 7:6-7, "his seed will be a sojourner in a foreign land," as he told the council how God kept His word to Abraham. It all came to pass just as God said.

New Testament links: Acts 7:6 (quoted); Acts 7:7 (quoted)

15:15-16 *And you, you will go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried in a good old age. And **in** the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite **is** not yet complete."*

God gave Abram a personal promise. "You, you will go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried in a good old age." Abram himself would not see the slavery or the return. He would die in peace, at about 175 (25:7-8).

"In the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." The Amorites here stand for the peoples of Canaan. God would not give the land to Israel yet, because the sin of its people had not yet reached its full measure. God was patient even with the Canaanites. Scripture presents Israel's later conquest as God's judgment on centuries of wickedness, not as a land grab (Deuteronomy 9:4-5).

God is patient, but His patience has an end. He gives people time to repent (2 Peter 3:9). The day comes when that time runs out.

15:17 *And it happened, the sun had gone **down**, and **there** was thick darkness; and look, an oven of smoke and a torch of fire which passed between these pieces.*

After dark came "an oven of smoke and a torch of fire which passed between these pieces." Smoke and fire often stand for God's presence in Scripture. God led Israel by a pillar of cloud and fire (Exodus 13:21), and He came down on Mount Sinai in smoke and fire (Exodus 19:18).

The most striking detail is that only God passed between the pieces. Abram did not. Abram was asleep. In Jeremiah 34:18-19, the people who bound themselves by the covenant were the ones who walked between the pieces. Here God walked through alone, which meant He alone took on the whole weight of the promise.

That is why I believe the covenant with Abram is unconditional. Its fulfillment rests on God, not on Abram or his descendants. God put His own name on the line. He will keep it.

15:18-21 *On that day the LORD cut a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your seed I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite, and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim, and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite."*

"On that day the LORD cut a covenant with Abram." God "cut" a covenant, as the Hebrew says, which fits the ceremony.

God gave the boundaries: "From the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates." The river of Egypt may be the wadi, or seasonal stream, at the southern edge of Canaan (called "the brook of Egypt" in Numbers 34:5), or it may be the easternmost branch of the Nile. Bible teachers differ. Israel came closest to these borders in the days of David and Solomon (1 Kings 4:21), but I believe the full promise still awaits a future fulfillment.

God then named ten peoples who lived in the land. These were real nations, and God promised the land they held to Abram's descendants. The covenant was sealed. God had spoken, and God had walked between the pieces. Romans 11:29 says the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. God does not take back His promises.

Chapter 15 Summary

After Abram's victory, the LORD came to him in a vision, telling him not to fear, because God was his shield and his reward would be exceedingly great. Abram said he was still childless and his servant Eliezer would be his heir. God promised him a son of his own and showed him the stars, saying his descendants would be as many. Abram believed the LORD, and God credited it to him as righteousness, the verse Paul uses to show that salvation has always been by grace through faith. To confirm the promise of the land, God had Abram prepare animals for a covenant ceremony. God told him that his descendants would be enslaved in a foreign land for four hundred years and then come out with great possessions and return in the fourth generation. After dark, a smoking oven and a flaming torch, signs of God's presence, passed between the pieces alone, and the LORD made a covenant to give Abram's descendants the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates.

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. What two things did God tell Abram about Himself in 15:1, and why would they matter after chapter 14?

2. What was Abram's concern, and who was his heir at that point? (15:2-3)

3. God took Abram outside to count the stars (15:5). Why do you think God gave him something he could see every clear night?

4. What does it mean that God "counted it to him as righteousness"? (15:6)

5. How does Paul use 15:6 in Romans 4 and Galatians 3?

6. God told Abram hard news about slavery in a foreign land (15:13-16). Why do you think He told him ahead of time?

7. Why did God wait to give the land to Abram's descendants? (15:16)

8. Who passed between the pieces of the animals, and why is that important? (15:17)

9. Abram was honest with God about his disappointment. What would it look like for you to pray that honestly?

10. Is there a promise of God you are finding hard to believe right now? How does Abram's example help you?

Chapter 16: Hagar and Ishmael

Scripture

16:1-6 And Sarai, the wife of Abram, had not borne ***children*** to him; and she had an Egyptian female servant, and her name ***was*** Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Look, please, the LORD has restrained me from bearing. Please go in to my female servant; perhaps I will be built up from her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai the wife of Abram took Hagar the Egyptian, her female servant, at the end of ten years of the dwelling of Abram in the land of Canaan, and she gave her to Abram her husband, to him as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and she saw that she had conceived, and her mistress became of little account in her eyes. And Sarai said to Abram, "The violence ***done*** to me ***is*** on you! I ***myself*** gave my female servant into your bosom, and she saw that she had conceived, and I became of little account in her eyes. May the LORD judge between me and you." And Abram said to Sarai, "Look, your female servant ***is*** in your hand; do to her ***what is*** good in your eyes." And Sarai afflicted her, and she fled from before her.

16:7-16 And the angel of the LORD found her by the spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way of Shur. And he said, "Hagar, female servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" And she said, "From before Sarai my mistress I am fleeing." And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and humble yourself under her hands." And the angel of the LORD said to her, "I will surely multiply your seed, and it will not be counted because of ***its*** multitude." And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Look, you ***are*** pregnant, and you will bear a son, and you will call his name Ishmael, for the LORD has listened to your affliction. And he will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand ***will be*** against everyone, and the hand of everyone against him; and in the face of all his brothers he will dwell." And she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You ***are*** a God of seeing," for she said, "Have I also here seen after Him who sees me?" Therefore ***one*** called the well Beer-lahai-roi; look, ***it is*** between Kadesh and Bered. And Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. And Abram ***was*** a son of eighty-six years when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

Chapter 16 Preview

Ten years have passed since Abram came to Canaan, and Sarai still has no child. She decides to help God's promise along. Following a custom of the time, she gives her Egyptian servant Hagar to Abram as a wife, hoping to have a child through her. Abram agrees. Hagar becomes pregnant, and the home falls apart. Hagar looks down on Sarai, Sarai blames Abram, Abram steps back, and Sarai treats Hagar so harshly that she runs away.

In the wilderness, the angel of the LORD finds Hagar by a spring. He tells her to go back, promises that her descendants will be too many to count, and tells her to name her son Ishmael, which means God hears. Hagar, a runaway servant with no one on her side, calls the LORD "a God of seeing." She goes back, and Ishmael is born when Abram is eighty-six.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1-2 *And Sarai, the wife of Abram, had not borne **children** to him; and she had an Egyptian female servant, and her name **was** Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Look, please, the LORD has restrained me from bearing. Please go in to my female servant; perhaps I will be built up from her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.*

"Sarai, the wife of Abram, had not borne children to him." God had promised Abram a son from his own body (15:4), but He had not yet said that son would come through Sarai. Sarai drew her own conclusion: "the LORD has restrained me from bearing."

Her plan followed a custom of the day. Ancient law codes, such as the Laws of Hammurabi, and marriage contracts from Mesopotamia mention this practice: a childless wife could give her servant to her husband, and the child could be counted as hers. A servant given this way became a concubine, a secondary wife with fewer rights than a full wife. It was legal and normal in their world. But it was not God's way, and it was not God's plan.

"Abram listened to the voice of Sarai." Those words echo 3:17, where God said Adam had "listened to the voice of your wife." In both cases, a husband went along with a plan he should have brought to God. Scripture doesn't record either of them praying about it. When we get tired of waiting on God, we are tempted to take matters into our own hands.

16:3 *And Sarai the wife of Abram took Hagar the Egyptian, her female servant, at the end of ten years of the dwelling of Abram in the land of Canaan, and she gave her to Abram her husband, to him as a wife.*

Moses gives the details: it was "at the end of ten years of the dwelling of Abram in the land of Canaan." He was eighty-five, and Sarai was seventy-five. They had waited a long time, and it seemed God's promise was not coming. Sarai "gave her to Abram her husband, to him as a wife."

Scripture records this honestly, but it does not approve it. God's pattern for marriage was set in the garden: one man and one woman becoming one flesh (2:24). Jesus pointed back to that same pattern (Matthew 19:4-6). Every time the Bible shows a man with more than one wife, trouble follows. We are about to see it.

Hagar was "the Egyptian." She may have come into the household during Abram's time in Egypt (12:16). The shortcut Abram took in Egypt produced the servant for this shortcut.

16:4 *And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and she saw that she had conceived, and her mistress became of little account in her eyes.*

Hagar became pregnant quickly, and "her mistress became of little account in her eyes." The servant began to look down on the woman who owned her. In a world that valued children so highly, Hagar may have felt she was now more important than the barren wife.

The plan worked, and it was a disaster. Sarai got what she asked for and lost her peace. Getting what we want by our own methods often brings pain we did not expect.

16:5 *And Sarai said to Abram, "The violence **done** to me **is** on you! I **myself** gave my female servant into your bosom, and she saw that she had conceived, and I became of little account in her eyes. May the LORD judge between me and you."*

Sarai turned on Abram. "The violence done to me is on you!" It was her idea, but now she blamed him. "May the LORD judge between me and you."

Sin breaks relationships. Back in the garden, Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent (3:12-13). Here, Sarai blames Abram. The household that should have been an example of faith became a house of jealousy and blame.

Sarai was not entirely wrong, though. Abram was the head of the home and should have led his family better. He had the responsibility, and he let it go.

16:6 *And Abram said to Sarai, "Look, your female servant **is** in your hand; do to her **what is** good in your eyes." And Sarai afflicted her, and she fled from before her.*

Abram said, "Your female servant is in your hand; do to her what is good in your eyes." He stepped back and let Sarai handle it. He did not protect Hagar, who was now carrying his child. He did not try to bring peace. He just washed his hands of it.

"And Sarai afflicted her, and she fled from before her." The Hebrew word is the same one used later for how the Egyptians treated Israel when they were slaves (15:13; Exodus 1:11-12). The irony is painful. An Egyptian slave was treated harshly by the family whose descendants would one day be treated harshly in Egypt.

Hagar "fled from before her." A pregnant woman ran into the wilderness alone. Everyone in this story had done wrong, and the most powerless person was paying the highest price.

16:7 *And the angel of the LORD found her by the spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way of Shur.*

"And the angel of the LORD found her." The angel of the LORD appears here for the first time in the Bible. Hagar was not looking for God, but God came looking for her.

She was "by the spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way of Shur," on the road toward Egypt. She was going home. A runaway servant in that world had no protection and few places to go.

Who is the angel of the LORD? The word "angel" means messenger. But as this passage goes on, the angel speaks as God Himself, makes promises only God can make, and Hagar calls Him God (16:10, 13). The SLB prints "angel" with a small letter, and this study does the same. Many Bible teachers believe the angel of the LORD was the Son of God appearing before He was born in Bethlehem. Others think He was a created angel who spoke with God's full authority. Those who hold the first view point out that He speaks as God and is called God, and yet is sent by the LORD. When the angel of the LORD appears again in later chapters, we will point back here.

16:8 *And he said, "Hagar, female servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" And she said, "From before Sarai my mistress I am fleeing."*

"Hagar, female servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" He called her by name. To Abram and Sarai she was "my female servant" and "your female servant" (16:2, 6). Neither of them ever calls her by name in this chapter. God does.

God's questions were not because He needed information. He was inviting her to think about where she was and where she was heading. Hagar answered honestly about where she came from: "From before Sarai my mistress I am fleeing." She did not know where she was going.

God still asks us those two questions. Where have you come from? Where are you going? They are good questions for anyone running from a hard place.

16:9-10 *And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and humble yourself under her hands." And the angel of the LORD said to her, "I will surely multiply your seed, and it will not be counted because of **its** multitude."*

"Return to your mistress, and humble yourself under her hands." That was a hard command. God did not approve of how Sarai had treated her. But God sent her back because her child's future and her own safety were tied to Abram's household for now. Out in the wilderness, she and the baby might well have died.

This was God's word to Hagar, in her time and place, and He went with her and protected her. It is not a rule for every person who is being mistreated. God never asks anyone to stay in a place where they are being abused. If you are in danger at home, please reach out to someone you trust, a pastor, a counselor or the authorities, and get safe. The God who saw Hagar sees you, and He wants you safe.

Then came a promise: "I will surely multiply your seed, and it will not be counted because of its multitude." The angel says "I will," speaking as only God could. Hagar, a slave woman, received a promise very much like the one God gave Abram.

16:11-12 *And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Look, you **are** pregnant, and you will bear a son, and you will call his name Ishmael, for the LORD has listened to your affliction. And he will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand **will be** against everyone, and the hand of everyone against him; and in the face of all his brothers he will dwell."*

"You will call his name Ishmael." Ishmael means God hears. Why that name? "For the LORD has listened to your affliction." Every time Hagar called her son's name, she would remember that God had heard her when no one else did.

Verse 12 describes Ishmael's future. "A wild donkey of a man" was not an insult in that setting. The wild donkey was a free animal of the desert that no one could tame. Ishmael would be a free and independent man of the wilderness. He would live in conflict with others, and "in the face of all his brothers he will dwell." His descendants, the Ishmaelites, became desert tribes in Arabia (25:12-18).

16:13-14 *And she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You **are** a God of seeing," for she said, "Have I also here seen after Him who sees me?" Therefore **one** called the well Beer-lahai-roi; look, **it is** between Kadesh and Bered.*

Hagar gave the LORD a name: "You are a God of seeing." In Hebrew, El Roi. Hagar is the only person in Genesis who gives God Himself a name like this. A foreign slave woman, pregnant, mistreated and alone, met the God who sees.

"Have I also here seen after Him who sees me?" She was amazed that she had seen God and lived.

The well was named "Beer-lahai-roi," meaning the well of the Living One who sees me. Isaac would later live near this well (24:62; 25:11).

If you feel unseen today, overlooked by your family, used by others, alone in your own wilderness, remember Hagar. The God who saw her sees you. And the God who heard her hears you.

16:15-16 *And Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. And Abram **was** a son of eighty-six years when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.*

Hagar went back, and she "bore Abram a son." Abram named him Ishmael, as the angel had said. Hagar must have told him what happened at the well.

"Abram was a son of eighty-six years." Thirteen more years will pass before God speaks again in Genesis about the promised son (17:1). Ishmael was Abram's son, and God loved him and blessed him (17:20). But he was not the son of promise. Paul uses Ishmael and Isaac to show the difference between trying to accomplish God's will in our own strength and receiving it as a gift of His promise (Galatians 4:22-31). Isaac would come by a miracle. Ishmael came by human planning.

New Testament links: Galatians 4:22-23 (alluded to); Galatians 4:24 (alluded to)

Chapter 16 Summary

After ten years in Canaan, Sarai still had no child, so she gave her Egyptian servant Hagar to Abram as a wife, following a custom of the day. Abram agreed. When Hagar conceived, she looked down on Sarai, Sarai blamed Abram, Abram left Hagar in Sarai's hands, and Sarai treated her so harshly that she fled. The angel of the LORD found Hagar by a spring in the wilderness, told her to return and submit, promised her countless descendants, and told her to name her son Ishmael, because the LORD had heard her affliction. Hagar called the LORD "a God of seeing," and the well was named Beer-lahai-roi. She returned and bore Ishmael when Abram was eighty-six. The plan brought pain to everyone in the home, and the New Testament contrasts Ishmael, born by human planning, with Isaac, the son of promise.

People and Places

- Hagar: Sarai's Egyptian servant, who became Abram's concubine and the mother of Ishmael.

- Ishmael: Abram's son by Hagar; his name means God hears.
- Shur: a wilderness area on the road from Canaan toward Egypt.
- Beer-lahai-roi: the well where the angel of the LORD met Hagar; it means well of the Living One who sees me.
- El Roi: a God who sees, the name Hagar gave the LORD.

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. Why did Sarai give Hagar to Abram? (16:1-2)

2. Abram and Sarai had waited ten years in Canaan (16:3). Why do you think the long wait made Sarai's shortcut so tempting?

3. Hagar, Sarai and Abram each did wrong (16:4-6). Who paid the highest price, and what does that teach us about sin in a family?

4. Where was Hagar when the angel of the LORD found her, and what two questions did He ask? (16:7-8)

5. The angel told Hagar to return and gave her a promise (16:9-10). Why should we read that command as a word for Hagar in her setting, not as a rule for everyone who is mistreated?

6. What does the name Ishmael mean, and why was he given that name? (16:11)

7. What name did Hagar give to the LORD? (16:13)

8. What does the angel of the LORD say and do in this chapter that suggests He is more than an ordinary angel?

9. Sarai and Abram tried to help God keep His promise. Where are you tempted to take a shortcut instead of waiting on God?

10. Hagar called the LORD "a God of seeing." How does it help you to know that God sees you in your hardest moments?

Chapter 17: The Sign of the Covenant

Scripture

17:1-8 And Abram was a son of ninety-nine years, and the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I ***am*** God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will set My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly, exceedingly." And Abram fell on his face, and God spoke with him, saying, "***As for*** Me, look, My covenant ***is*** with you, and you will become a father of a multitude of nations. And your name will no longer be called Abram, and your name will be Abraham, for a father of a multitude of nations I have made you. And I will make you fruitful exceedingly, exceedingly, and I will make you into nations, and kings will come out from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your seed after you. And I will give to you and to your seed after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be God to them."

17:9-14 And God said to Abraham, "And you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your seed after you throughout their generations. This ***is*** My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your seed after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised ***in*** the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be for a sign of the covenant between Me and you. And a son of eight days shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations, one born of ***the*** house and one bought with silver from any foreigner who ***is*** not of your seed. He shall surely be circumcised, the one born of your house and the one bought with your silver; and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised ***in*** the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from its kinsmen; he has broken My covenant."

17:15-27 And God said to Abraham, "Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, for Sarah ***is*** her name. And I will bless her, and also I will give you a son from her; and I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall be from her." And Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and he said in his heart, "Will ***one*** be born to a son of a hundred years? And will Sarah, a daughter of ninety years, bear?" And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live before You!" And God said, "Indeed, Sarah your wife ***is*** bearing you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, for his seed after him. And concerning Ishmael, I have heard you. Look, I have blessed him, and I will make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly, exceedingly; twelve princes he will father, and I will make him into a great nation. And My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this appointed time in the next year." And He finished speaking with him, and God went up from Abraham. And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all those born of his house, and all those bought with his silver, every male among the men of the house of Abraham, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskin on this very day, just as God had spoken with him. And Abraham ***was*** a son of ninety-nine years when he was circumcised ***in*** the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son ***was*** a son of thirteen years when he was circumcised ***in*** the flesh of his foreskin. On this very day Abraham was circumcised, and Ishmael his son. And all the men of his house, one born of ***the*** house and one bought with silver from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

Chapter 17 Preview

Thirteen years have passed since Ishmael was born. Abram is ninety-nine. Then the LORD appears to him as God Almighty and renews His covenant. He changes Abram's name to Abraham, "a father of a multitude of nations," and promises that nations and kings will come from him. He promises to be God to Abraham's descendants forever and to give them all the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession.

God then gives the covenant a sign: every male in Abraham's household is to be circumcised. God changes Sarai's name to Sarah and says plainly that she will bear a son within a year. Abraham laughs at the thought of a son at a hundred and asks God to bless Ishmael instead. God will bless Ishmael, but the covenant will go through Isaac. That same day, Abraham obeys and circumcises every male in his house.

Chapter 17 Study

17:1 *And Abram was a son of ninety-nine years, and the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I **am** God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless.*

"Abram was a son of ninety-nine years." Thirteen silent years have passed since the end of chapter 16. Abram may have settled into thinking Ishmael was the promised son. Now Sarai is far past the age for children. Every human hope is gone. That is when God speaks.

"I am God Almighty." In Hebrew, El Shaddai. God has not called Himself by this name before in Scripture. It speaks of His power to do what no one else can. A God who is almighty can give a son to a man of ninety-nine and a woman of eighty-nine.

"Walk before Me, and be blameless." To walk before God means to live every day in His presence, knowing He sees. Blameless does not mean sinless. It means wholehearted, a life of integrity and sincere devotion. God's grace comes first, and then He calls us to live in a way that fits it.

17:2-3 *And I will set My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly, exceedingly." And Abram fell on his face, and God spoke with him, saying,*

"I will set My covenant between Me and you." God is not starting a new covenant here. He is confirming and expanding the one He made in chapters 12 and 15.

"Abram fell on his face." That is the right response when God speaks. It is a posture of worship and humility. Abram had met with God before, but he never got casual about it. The closer we walk with God, the more we bow before Him.

17:4-5 *"**As for** Me, look, My covenant **is** with you, and you will become a father of a multitude of nations. And your name will no longer be called Abram, and your name will be Abraham, for a father of a multitude of nations I have made you.*

"You will become a father of a multitude of nations." Then God changed his name. Abram means exalted father. Abraham sounds like "father of a multitude." In that world, a name told who you were. God gave Abraham a new name to match His promise.

Imagine an old man with one teenage son introducing himself to his neighbors as "father of a multitude." It took faith just to say his own name. Every time someone called him Abraham, he was reminded of what God had promised.

How is he the father of many nations? In one sense, through Ishmael, Isaac and his other sons, many peoples came from him. In a deeper sense, Paul says Abraham is the father of all who believe, Jew and Gentile alike (Romans 4:16-17). If you belong to Christ, you are Abraham's spiritual child (Galatians 3:29).

New Testament links: Romans 4:17 (quoted)

17:6-7 *And I will make you fruitful exceedingly, exceedingly, and I will make you into nations, and kings will come out from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your seed after you.*

"Kings will come out from you." Israel's kings, including David, would come from Abraham. And the greatest King of all, Jesus, is called "son of David, son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1).

God calls this "an everlasting covenant." It does not run out. And its center is a relationship: "to be God to you and to your seed after you." The best gift in the covenant is not land or children. It is God Himself. The whole Bible moves toward that promise, all the way to the end, when God says He will dwell among His people and be their God (Revelation 21:3).

17:8 *And I will give to you and to your seed after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be God to them."*

God promised "all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession." The land of Canaan was "the land of your sojournings," the land where Abraham lived as a foreigner. God promised it to his descendants for all time.

I take "everlasting" at its plain meaning. God has not canceled His promise to Israel. Paul says God has not rejected His people (Romans 11:1-2) and that His gifts and calling are irrevocable (Romans 11:29). I believe God still has a future for the nation of Israel, including the land. Gentile believers share in Abraham's blessing through Christ, but that does not erase what God promised to Abraham's physical descendants.

"And I will be God to them." The land promise is never separated from the relationship. God wants a people who know Him, living in a land He gave them.

Paul points to the words "to your seed" in Galatians 3:16 and says that Seed is "Christ." As I noted at 13:14-15, some teachers read this as moving the land promise to Christ and His church, but I believe Christ is the One through whom Abraham's physical descendants will receive this land "for an everlasting possession."

New Testament links: Galatians 3:16 (quoted); Acts 7:5 (alluded to)

17:9-11 *And God said to Abraham, "And you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your seed after you throughout their generations. This **is** My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your seed after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised **in** the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be for a sign of the covenant between Me and you.*

Now God gives Abraham's part: "You shall keep My covenant." God's part is the promise. Abraham's part is to receive it and carry its sign.

The sign was circumcision. Circumcision is the cutting away of the foreskin of the male organ. Other peoples in the ancient world practiced it for various reasons, but God gave it a new meaning. It would be "a sign of the covenant between Me and you." A sign is a mark that points to something greater. Every Hebrew man carried in his body a reminder that he belonged to God's covenant people.

Paul tells us circumcision was "a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had in the uncircumcision" (Romans 4:11). Abraham was right with God by faith in chapter 15. Circumcision came later, in chapter 17, as an outward sign of that inward faith. The sign never saved anyone. It pointed to God's promise.

New Testament links: John 7:22 (alluded to); Romans 4:11 (alluded to); Acts 7:8 (alluded to)

17:12-13 *And a son of eight days shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations, one born of **the** house and one bought with silver from any foreigner who **is** not of your seed. He shall surely be circumcised, the one born of your house and the one bought with your silver; and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.*

Every male was to be circumcised as "a son of eight days." That included servants born in the house or bought with money. Anyone who belonged to Abraham's household was brought under the sign of the covenant, even foreigners.

The sign was given to babies who could not yet understand it. It marked them as part of God's people from the start of their lives, and they would grow up being taught what it meant.

"My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant." The covenant went as deep as the body. Later, Moses and the prophets taught that God wanted more than outward circumcision. He wanted circumcised hearts, hearts that love Him (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4).

New Testament links: Luke 1:59 (alluded to)

17:14 *And an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised **in** the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from its kinsmen; he has broken My covenant."*

Of an uncircumcised male God said, "that soul shall be cut off from its kinsmen." To be cut off means to be removed from the covenant community and its blessings. Refusing the sign meant refusing the covenant. "He has broken My covenant."

Do Christians need to be circumcised today? The New Testament answers clearly: no. The early church settled this in Acts 15. Paul says that in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but a new creation (Galatians 6:15). What God is after now is what circumcision always pointed to: a heart changed by the Spirit (Romans 2:28-29; Colossians 2:11). Still, the principle stands. God's people are marked as His. Today that mark is a heart changed by the Spirit through faith in Christ (Ephesians 1:13). To refuse God's way of salvation, which is faith in His Son, is to remain outside His covenant.

17:15-16 *And God said to Abraham, "Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, for Sarah **is** her name. And I will bless her, and also I will give you a son from her; and I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall be from her."*

God turned to Sarai. "Sarah is her name." Both names likely mean "princess." The new name marked a new beginning for her too.

Then came the news Abraham had waited for: "I will bless her, and also I will give you a son from her." For the first time, God said plainly that the promised son would come through Sarah. Not Hagar, not an adopted servant. Sarah. And "she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall be from her."

God had not forgotten Sarah. She had felt left out of the promise. She had tried to help it happen through Hagar. Now God named her as the mother of the promised line.

17:17 *And Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and he said in his heart, "Will **one** be born to a son of a hundred years? And will Sarah, a daughter of ninety years, bear?"*

"Abraham fell on his face and laughed." He bowed in worship and laughed at the same time. "Will one be born to a son of a hundred years? And will Sarah, a daughter of ninety years, bear?"

Was this a laugh of unbelief or a laugh of amazed joy? It may have been some of both. Paul says that Abraham considered his own body as good as dead and Sarah's womb as dead, and still did not waver in unbelief (Romans 4:19-20). God did not rebuke Abraham's laugh here. Instead He turned it into the name of his son.

New Testament links: Romans 4:19 (alluded to)

17:18-19 *And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live before You!" And God said, "Indeed, Sarah your wife **is** bearing you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, for his seed after him.*

"If only Ishmael might live before You!" Abraham loved Ishmael. He had raised him for thirteen years. In effect he was asking God to bless the son he already had.

God's answer was firm and kind. "Sarah your wife is bearing you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac." Isaac means he laughs. Abraham laughed, and God named the boy Laughter. One day Sarah will say God has made laughter for her (21:6).

"I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant." The promised line would go through Isaac, not Ishmael. God's plans do not bend to our preferences, even our loving ones.

17:20-21 *And concerning Ishmael, I have heard you. Look, I have blessed him, and I will make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly, exceedingly; twelve princes he will father, and I will make him into a great nation. And My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this appointed time in the next year."*

God did not ignore Abraham's prayer. "And concerning Ishmael, I have heard you." Ishmael's name means God hears, and God heard. He would be blessed, made fruitful, and "twelve princes he will father," and he would become a great nation. That came true in 25:12-16.

"And My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this appointed time in the next year." Now God gave a timeline. After twenty-four years of waiting, the son would come within a year.

God can bless many people in many ways while keeping one line of promise. Ishmael was loved and blessed. Isaac was chosen to carry the covenant that would lead to the Messiah.

17:22-27 *And He finished speaking with him, and God went up from Abraham. And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all those born of his house, and all those bought with his silver, every male among the men of the house of Abraham, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskin on this very day, just as God had spoken with him. And Abraham **was** a son of ninety-nine years when he was circumcised **in** the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son **was** a son of thirteen years when he was circumcised **in** the flesh of his foreskin. On this very day Abraham was circumcised, and Ishmael his son. And all the men of his house, one born of **the** house and one bought with silver from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.*

"God went up from Abraham." The meeting was over. And Abraham obeyed "on this very day."

He did not wait or put it off. He circumcised himself at ninety-nine, Ishmael at thirteen, and every man in his household. That was hundreds of men (14:14), and it was not a comfortable thing to ask of them. Abraham led by example.

Moses repeats the details carefully, the ages and the words "on this very day," to show that Abraham's obedience was complete and immediate. Faith in chapter 15 led to obedience in

chapter 17. That is always the order. We are saved by faith, and real faith shows itself in obedience (James 2:21-24).

Ishmael was circumcised too. Even though the covenant line would go through Isaac, Ishmael was included in the sign as a member of Abraham's household.

Chapter 17 Summary

When Abram was ninety-nine, the LORD appeared to him as God Almighty, told him to walk before Him and be blameless, and confirmed His covenant. God changed his name to Abraham, father of a multitude, and promised that nations and kings would come from him, that He would be God to his descendants, and that He would give them all the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. As the sign of the covenant, every male in Abraham's household was to be circumcised, including baby boys at eight days old. God changed Sarai's name to Sarah and promised that she would bear Abraham a son. Abraham laughed and asked God to bless Ishmael. God promised to bless Ishmael and make him a great nation, but said the covenant would be established with Isaac, who would be born the next year. That same day Abraham circumcised himself, Ishmael and all the men of his household.

People and Places

- El Shaddai: "God Almighty," the name God uses for Himself in 17:1.
- Abraham: Abram's new name, meaning "father of a multitude."
- Sarah: Sarai's new name; both forms likely mean "princess."
- Isaac: the promised son of Abraham and Sarah; his name means he laughs.

Chapter 17 Study Questions

1. Thirteen years pass between 16:16 and 17:1 with no recorded word from God. How do you think those silent years felt to Abram, and what do you do with seasons when God seems quiet?

2. What name did God use for Himself, and what did He tell Abram to do? (17:1)

3. God changed Abram's name to Abraham, "a father of a multitude of nations," before Abraham had the son of promise (17:5). Why do you think God gave the name first?

4. What did God promise about kings, the covenant and the land? (17:6-8)

5. What was the sign of the covenant, and who was to receive it? (17:10-13)

6. According to Romans 4:11, what did circumcision mean for Abraham?

7. What did God promise about Sarah, and how did Abraham respond? (17:15-17)

8. What did God promise for Ishmael, and with whom did He say He would establish His covenant? (17:20-21)

9. Abraham obeyed "on this very day." Is there something God has shown you to do that you have been putting off?

10. God gave Abraham a new name to match His promise. What does God say about who you are in Christ, and how should that shape the way you live?

Chapter 18: The LORD Visits Abraham

Scripture

18:1-15 And the LORD appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre, and he ***was*** sitting ***at*** the opening of the tent in the heat of the day. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and look, three men ***were*** standing by him; and he saw ***them***, and he ran to meet them from the opening of the tent, and he bowed down to the ground, and he said, "Lord, if, please, I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not pass by from Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And let me bring a piece of bread, and sustain your heart; after ***that*** you may pass on, for because of this you have passed by your servant." And they said, "So you shall do, just as you have spoken." And Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and he said, "Hurry, approximately 21 quarts (three seahs) of meal, fine flour! Knead ***it*** and make cakes." And Abraham ran to the herd, and he took a young one of the herd, tender and good, and gave ***it*** to the young man, and he hurried to prepare it. And he took curds and milk and the young one of the herd which he had prepared, and set ***it*** before them; and he ***was*** standing by them under the tree, and they ate. And they said to him, "Where ***is*** Sarah your wife?" And he said, "Look, in the tent." And He said, "I will surely return to you when the time revives, and look, Sarah your wife ***will have*** a son." And Sarah ***was*** listening ***at*** the opening of the tent, and it ***was*** behind him. And Abraham and Sarah ***were*** old, advanced in days; it had ceased to be with Sarah ***after*** the way of women. And Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have become worn out, will I have pleasure, and my lord is old?" And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why ***is*** this ***that*** Sarah laughed, saying, 'Will I also truly bear ***a child***, and I am old?' Is anything ***too*** wonderful for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, when the time revives, and Sarah ***will have*** a son." And Sarah denied ***it***, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh."

18:16-33 And the men arose from there and looked down over the face of Sodom, and Abraham ***was*** walking with them to send them off. And the LORD said, "Shall I conceal from Abraham what I am about to do, and Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? For I have known him, so that he may command his sons and his house after him, and they will keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring on Abraham that which He has spoken concerning him." And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah, indeed, is great, and their sin, indeed, is exceedingly heavy. Let Me go down, please, and see whether they have done altogether according to its outcry which has come to Me; and if not, I will know." And the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, and Abraham ***was*** still standing before the LORD. And Abraham drew near and said, "Will You also sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Perhaps there are fifty righteous in the midst of the city; will You also sweep ***it*** away and not forgive the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who ***are*** in its midst? Far be it from You to do according to this manner, to put to death the righteous with the wicked, and it would be, the righteous as the wicked. Far be it from You! Will not the Judge of all the earth do justice?" And the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous in the midst of the city, then I will forgive all the place for their sake." And Abraham answered and said, "Look, please, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, and I ***am*** dust and ashes. Perhaps the fifty righteous will lack five; will You destroy all the city for five?" And He said,

"I will not destroy ***it*** if I find there forty-five." And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Perhaps forty will be found there." And He said, "I will not do ***it*** for the sake of the forty." And he said, "Please let the Lord not be angry, and let me speak: perhaps thirty will be found there." And He said, "I will not do ***it*** if I find there thirty." And he said, "Look, please, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord: perhaps twenty will be found there." And He said, "I will not destroy ***it*** for the sake of the twenty." And he said, "Please let the Lord not be angry, and let me speak only this once: perhaps ten will be found there." And He said, "I will not destroy ***it*** for the sake of the ten." And the LORD went, when He had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

Chapter 18 Preview

On a hot afternoon at Mamre, three men appear near Abraham's tent. Abraham runs to meet them, bows, and prepares a generous meal. As they eat, it becomes clear that one of these visitors is the LORD Himself. He announces that Sarah will have a son by this time next year. Sarah, listening behind the tent door, laughs to herself. The LORD asks, "Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?"

As the visitors leave, the LORD tells Abraham that He is going to look into the great outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham, knowing Lot lives there, stands before the LORD and pleads for the city. Would God spare it for fifty righteous people? For forty-five? For forty, thirty, twenty, ten? Each time the LORD says yes. The chapter shows us the friendship between God and Abraham, and the heart of a man who prays for others.

Chapter 18 Study

18:1-2 *And the LORD appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre, and he **was** sitting **at** the opening of the tent in the heat of the day. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and look, three men **were** standing by him; and he saw **them**, and he ran to meet them from the opening of the tent, and he bowed down to the ground,*

"And the LORD appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre." Moses tells the reader up front who the visitor is, even though Abraham may not have known it at first. It was "the heat of the day," the time when most people rested in the shade.

Abraham "lifted up his eyes and saw, and look, three men." He ran to meet them and "bowed down to the ground." In that culture, bowing was a common way of showing honor to a guest, even a stranger. Abraham was ninety-nine, and he ran in the midday heat.

Who were the three? As the story goes on, we learn that one was the LORD and the other two were angels (19:1). God appeared in human form for a short time. Many believe this was the Son of God appearing before His birth, as with the angel of the LORD (see chapter 16). We are not told exactly how this happened, but the text plainly says the LORD was there, speaking with Abraham and eating at his table.

New Testament links: Hebrews 13:2 (alluded to)

18:3-5 *and he said, "Lord, if, please, I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not pass by from Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And let me bring a piece of bread, and sustain your heart; after **that** you may pass on, for because of this you have passed by your servant." And they said, "So you shall do, just as you have spoken."*

"Lord," said Abraham, "if, please, I have found favor in Your eyes, please do not pass by from Your servant." The word "Lord" is printed with a capital letter here, because Abraham is speaking to the LORD, the chief of the three visitors (18:1). Some believe Abraham knew this from the start. Others think he came to see it as the visit went on. Either way, he speaks humbly and calls himself "Your servant."

He offered "a little water" to wash their feet and "a piece of bread." That was polite understatement. He was about to serve them a feast.

Hospitality, welcoming and caring for guests, was a sacred duty in the ancient world. Travelers could die without it. Hebrews 13:2 tells us not to neglect showing hospitality to strangers, because by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it. Abraham is the clearest example. He may not have known who they were when he ran to meet them. He was simply kind.

18:6-8 *And Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, and he said, "Hurry, approximately 21 quarts (three seahs) of meal, fine flour! Knead **it** and make cakes." And Abraham ran to the herd, and he took a young one of the herd, tender and good, and gave **it** to the young man, and he hurried to prepare it. And he took curds and milk and the young one of the herd which he had prepared, and set **it** before them; and he **was** standing by them under the tree, and they ate.*

Abraham "hurried," "ran," and the servant "hurried." He told Sarah to use "approximately 21 quarts (three seahs) of meal, fine flour!" That was a great deal of flour. He chose "a young one of the herd, tender and good." Meat was a rare luxury, saved for special occasions. He added "curds and milk."

Then Abraham "was standing by them under the tree, and they ate." He did not sit down with them. He stood ready to serve, as a servant would.

The LORD ate a meal with Abraham. That shows how close their friendship was. Scripture calls Abraham the friend of God (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). Jesus, after His resurrection, also ate with His disciples (Luke 24:41-43). God draws near to His people around a table.

18:9-10 *And they said to him, "Where **is** Sarah your wife?" And he said, "Look, in the tent." And He said, "I will surely return to you when the time revives, and look, Sarah your wife **will have** a son." And Sarah **was** listening **at** the opening of the tent, and it **was** behind him.*

"Where is Sarah your wife?" How did a stranger know her name? Sarah's name had only recently been changed (17:15). This was no ordinary guest.

"I will surely return to you when the time revives, and look, Sarah your wife will have a son." God had told Abraham in chapter 17. Now He said it where Sarah could hear. "Sarah was listening at

the opening of the tent, and it was behind him." Women usually did not join male guests at a meal, so she was out of sight, but she heard every word.

Paul quotes this promise in Romans 9:9 and calls it "the word of promise." Isaac was born because God said so, not because of anything Abraham or Sarah could do.

New Testament links: Romans 9:9 (quoted); Galatians 4:23 (alluded to)

18:11-12 *And Abraham and Sarah **were** old, advanced in days; it had ceased to be with Sarah **after** the way of women. And Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have become worn out, will I have pleasure, and my lord is old?"*

Moses gives the plain facts: "Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in days; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the way of women." She had gone through the change of life. Humanly speaking, it was impossible.

"And Sarah laughed within herself." Her laugh was quiet and inside. "After I have become worn out, will I have pleasure, and my lord is old?" It was the laugh of someone who had hoped for too long and been disappointed too many times. Many of us know that feeling.

Even so, Sarah called Abraham "my lord," a term of respect for her husband. Peter points to this as an example of a wife's respect and trust in God (1 Peter 3:5-6). Peter's point is trust in God, not that a wife must go along with wrong. Sarah's own story shows how much harm comes when a husband puts his wife in danger to protect himself (12:13; 20:2).

New Testament links: Luke 1:7 (alluded to); Hebrews 11:11 (alluded to); 1 Peter 3:6 (alluded to); Romans 4:19 (alluded to)

18:13-14 *And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why **is** this **that** Sarah laughed, saying, 'Will I also truly bear **a child**, and I am old?' Is anything **too** wonderful for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, when the time revives, and Sarah **will have** a son."*

"Why is this that Sarah laughed?" The visitor heard a laugh she had not said out loud. He knew her heart. Only God could do that.

Then comes the question at the center of this chapter: "Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?" The obvious answer is no. Nothing is too hard for God. The angel Gabriel said something very similar to Mary about the birth of Jesus: nothing will be impossible with God (Luke 1:37). God gave a son to a barren old woman, and one day He would give a Son to a virgin.

"At the appointed time I will return to you." God had a date set. His timing is never late. Whatever you are facing, the same question stands over it: "Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?"

This does not mean God will give us everything we ask. Isaac's birth was part of God's unique plan for the promised line. It is not a promise that every couple who prays will have a child (see 11:30). But no need of ours is too hard for Him, and none is outside His care.

Paul's quotation in Romans 9:9, "At this time I will come, and there will be a son to Sarah," draws on this verse as well as verse 10.

New Testament links: Romans 9:9 (quoted); Luke 1:37 (alluded to)

18:15 *And Sarah denied **it**, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh."*

"Sarah denied it, saying, 'I did not laugh,' for she was afraid." She was caught, and she lied out of fear.

"And He said, 'No, but you did laugh.'" God did not let the lie stand, but He did not punish her either. He simply told the truth. God is gentle with His children, but He is always honest with us. And later, when Isaac was born, Sarah would laugh again, this time with joy (21:6). Hebrews 11:11 says that by faith Sarah received power to conceive, because she considered Him faithful who had promised. Her doubt was not the end of her story.

18:16-19 *And the men arose from there and looked down over the face of Sodom, and Abraham **was** walking with them to send them off. And the LORD said, "Shall I conceal from Abraham what I am about to do, and Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? For I have known him, so that he may command his sons and his house after him, and they will keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring on Abraham that which He has spoken concerning him."*

The visitors got up and "looked down over the face of Sodom." Abraham walked with them to see them off, as a good host did.

Then the LORD spoke, as if thinking aloud: "Shall I conceal from Abraham what I am about to do?" Why would He tell Abraham? Because of the covenant. Abraham would become "a great and mighty nation," and through him "all the nations of the earth will be blessed." God shares His plans with His friends (Amos 3:7; John 15:15).

"For I have known him, so that he may command his sons and his house after him, and they will keep the way of the LORD." God chose Abraham for a purpose: to raise a family that would live by "doing righteousness and justice." The blessing of the covenant was meant to be passed down through godly parenting. God gives Christian parents the same job today: to teach their children the way of the LORD.

Paul quotes this promise together with 12:3 in Galatians 3:8: "In you all the nations will be blessed." The nations are blessed the same way Abraham was, by faith (Galatians 3:9).

New Testament links: Galatians 3:8 (quoted)

18:20-21 *And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah, indeed, is great, and their sin, indeed, is exceedingly heavy. Let Me go down, please, and see whether they have done altogether according to its outcry which has come to Me; and if not, I will know."*

"The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah, indeed, is great." The word "outcry" is used for the cry of people who are suffering injustice. The victims of Sodom's wickedness were crying out, and God heard them.

"Let Me go down, please, and see." Just as at Babel (11:5), God speaks of coming down to look. He already knew. But God never judges based on rumor. He examines the facts. The Judge of all the earth gathers the evidence before He gives the verdict.

18:22 *And the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, and Abraham **was** still standing before the LORD.*

"The men turned from there and went toward Sodom." These were the two angels who arrive in Sodom in 19:1. "Abraham was still standing before the LORD."

Abraham did not walk away. He stayed in God's presence because he had something to say. Some ancient Hebrew scribes noted that this verse may first have read that the LORD remained standing before Abraham, as though God were waiting for Abraham to speak. Either way, the scene is one of a man lingering with God in prayer.

18:23-25 *And Abraham drew near and said, "Will You also sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Perhaps there are fifty righteous in the midst of the city; will You also sweep **it** away and not forgive the place for the sake of the fifty righteous who **are** in its midst? Far be it from You to do according to this manner, to put to death the righteous with the wicked, and it would be, the righteous as the wicked. Far be it from You! Will not the Judge of all the earth do justice?"*

"Abraham drew near." Prayer is coming near to God. Then he asked, "Will You also sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"

Abraham was thinking of Lot, but his prayer was bigger than one man. He asked whether God would spare the whole city for fifty righteous people living in it. He was appealing to God's own character: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do justice?"

Abraham was not accusing God. He was holding on to what he knew God to be. God is just. He does not treat the righteous and the wicked alike. Abraham built his prayer on that truth. The best prayers are built on who God is and what He has said.

New Testament links: Hebrews 12:23 (alluded to)

18:26-28 *And the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous in the midst of the city, then I will forgive all the place for their sake." And Abraham answered and said, "Look, please, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, and I **am** dust and ashes. Perhaps the fifty righteous will lack five; will You destroy all the city for five?" And He said, "I will not destroy **it** if I find there forty-five."*

The LORD agreed at once: "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous in the midst of the city, then I will forgive all the place."

Abraham was humble but bold. "I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, and I am dust and ashes." He knew his place. He was a creature made from dust, speaking to the Creator. Yet he kept asking. What about forty-five? The LORD said yes again.

Humility and boldness belong together in prayer. We come knowing we deserve nothing, and we come boldly because God invites us (Hebrews 4:16).

18:29-33 *And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Perhaps forty will be found there." And He said, "I will not do **it** for the sake of the forty." And he said, "Please let the Lord not be angry, and let me speak: perhaps thirty will be found there." And He said, "I will not do **it** if I find there thirty." And he said, "Look, please, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord: perhaps twenty will be found there." And He said, "I will not destroy **it** for the sake of the twenty." And he said, "Please let the Lord not be angry, and let me speak only this once: perhaps ten will be found there." And He said, "I will not destroy **it** for the sake of the ten." And the LORD went, when He had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.*

Forty. Thirty. Twenty. Ten. Each time Abraham asked, the LORD said He would not destroy the city for their sake. God never once lost patience. He was not reluctant. Abraham stopped asking before God stopped answering.

Why did Abraham stop at ten? We aren't told. Perhaps he thought surely there were at least ten righteous people in Sodom, counting Lot's family. There were not. But as we will see in chapter 19, God still remembered Abraham and rescued Lot (19:29).

This chapter shows us that God's people have a role in His plans. Abraham stood between a city and its judgment and prayed. We are called to pray the same way for our cities, our nation, our families and friends who do not know God (1 Timothy 2:1-4). God is more willing to show mercy than we are to ask for it.

"And Abraham returned to his place." The conversation was over, and Abraham went home to wait and see what God would do.

Chapter 18 Summary

The LORD appeared to Abraham by the terebinths of Mamre as one of three visitors. Abraham ran to meet them, bowed, and served them a generous meal. The LORD announced that Sarah would have a son by the same time next year. Sarah, listening at the tent door, laughed to herself because she and Abraham were so old. The LORD knew it and asked, "Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?" As the visitors set out toward Sodom, the LORD told Abraham, His chosen friend,

that He was going to look into the great outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham stood before the LORD and pleaded for the city, asking if God would spare it for fifty righteous people, then forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, and finally ten. Each time the LORD agreed. Then the LORD departed, and Abraham returned home.

Chapter 18 Study Questions

1. Abraham ran to serve three strangers in the heat of the day (18:2-8). What does his welcome, with Hebrews 13:2, teach us about hospitality today?

2. What did the LORD announce about Sarah? (18:10)

3. Why did Sarah laugh, and how did the LORD respond? (18:11-15)

4. What question did the LORD ask in 18:14, and how does Luke 1:37 echo it?

5. Why did the LORD decide to tell Abraham what He was about to do? (18:17-19)

6. The LORD already knew everything, yet He said He would "go down, please, and see" (18:20-21). What does that tell us about the way God judges?

7. On what truth about God did Abraham base his prayer? (18:25)

8. Abraham kept asking, from fifty down to ten, and the LORD kept saying yes (18:24-32). What does this conversation teach you about prayer?

9. Is there something in your life you have stopped believing God can do? How does 18:14 speak to that?

10. Who are the people or places you could stand before God for in prayer, the way Abraham prayed for Sodom?

Chapter 19: Sodom and Gomorrah

Scripture

19:1-11 And the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot ***was*** sitting in the gate of Sodom. And Lot saw ***them***, and he arose to meet them, and he bowed down ***with his*** face to the ground. And he said, "Look, please, my lords, please turn aside to the house of your servant, and spend the night, and wash your feet; and you may rise early and go on your way." And they said, "No, but we will spend the night in the square." And he pressed them exceedingly, and they turned aside to him and came into his house; and he made a feast for them, and he baked unleavened bread, and they ate. Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, from young man even to old man, all the people from ***every*** end. And they called to Lot and said to him, "Where ***are*** the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, and let us know them." And Lot went out to them, to the entrance, and the door he shut behind him, and he said, "Please, my brothers, do not do evil. Look, please, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them as ***is*** good in your eyes; only to these men do not do anything, for because of this they have come under the shadow of my roof." And they said, "Draw back!" And they said, "This one came to sojourn, and he keeps judging! Now we will do evil to you more than to them." And they pressed hard against the man, against Lot, exceedingly, and they drew near to break the door. And the men stretched out their hand and brought Lot to them into the house, and they shut the door. And the men who ***were at*** the entrance of the house they struck with blindness, from small even to great, and they wearied ***themselves*** to find the entrance.

19:12-29 And the men said to Lot, "Whom else do you have here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and all whom you have in the city, bring ***them*** out from the place; for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become great before the face of the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it." And Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who ***were*** taking his daughters, and he said, "Arise, go out from this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city." And he was like one who jests in the eyes of his sons-in-law. And when the dawn came up, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are found ***here***, lest you be swept away in the iniquity of the city." And he lingered, and the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hand of his two daughters, in the compassion of the LORD on him; and they brought him out and set him outside the city. And it happened, when they had brought them outside, and he said, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stop in all the district; escape to the mountain, lest you be swept away." And Lot said to them, "Not so, please, Lord! Look, please, Your servant has found favor in Your eyes, and You have made great Your steadfast love which You have done with me by keeping my soul alive; and I am not able to escape to the mountain, lest the disaster cling to me and I die. Look, please, this city ***is*** near to flee there, and it ***is*** a little ***one***; please let me escape there (is it not a little ***one***?), and my soul will live." And He said to him, "Look, I have lifted up your face also concerning this matter, not to overthrow the city of which you have spoken. Hurry, escape there, for I am not able to do anything until you come there." Therefore ***one*** called the name of the city Zoar. The sun had come out over the earth, and Lot came to Zoar. And the LORD rained on Sodom and on Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the

LORD out of the heavens. And He overthrew these cities, and all the district, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and the growth of the ground. And his wife looked from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt. And Abraham rose early in the morning ***and went*** to the place where he had stood there before the face of the LORD. And he looked down over the face of Sodom and Gomorrah, and over all the face of the land of the district, and he saw, and look, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of the furnace. And it happened, when God destroyed the cities of the district, and God remembered Abraham, and He sent Lot out from the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot had dwelt.

19:30-38 And Lot went up from Zoar and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar; and he dwelt in the cave, he and his two daughters. And the firstborn said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is no man in the earth to come in to us according to the way of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him, so that we may preserve seed from our father." And they made their father drink wine that night, and the firstborn went in and lay with her father; and he did not know when she lay down and when she arose. And it happened on the next day, and the firstborn said to the younger, "Look, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and go in, lie with him, so that we may preserve seed from our father." And they made their father drink wine that night also, and the younger arose and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down and when she arose. And the two daughters of Lot conceived from their father. And the firstborn bore a son, and she called his name Moab; he ***is*** the father of Moab to this day. And the younger, she also bore a son, and she called his name Ben-ammi; he ***is*** the father of the sons of Ammon to this day.

Chapter 19 Preview

Chapter 19 is a dark and hard chapter. The two angels who left Abraham in chapter 18 arrive in Sodom in the evening. Lot, now sitting in the city gate, takes them into his home. That night the men of the city surround the house and demand that Lot bring the visitors out so they can abuse them. Lot tries to protect his guests in a shameful way, and the angels strike the mob blind.

At dawn the angels drag Lot, his wife and his two daughters out of the city. The LORD rains fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot's wife looks back and becomes a pillar of salt. Abraham sees the smoke rising from far away, and Moses tells us God rescued Lot because He remembered Abraham. The chapter ends in a cave, where Lot's daughters, afraid they will never have children, get their father drunk and conceive by him. Their sons become the fathers of Moab and Ammon. The chapter shows us both God's judgment and His mercy.

Chapter 19 Study

19:1-3 *And the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot **was** sitting in the gate of Sodom. And Lot saw **them**, and he arose to meet them, and he bowed down **with his** face to the ground. And he said, "Look, please, my lords, please turn aside to the house of your servant, and spend the night, and wash your feet; and you may rise early and go on your way." And they said, "No, but we will spend the night in the square." And he pressed them exceedingly, and they turned aside to him and came into his house; and he made a feast for them, and he baked unleavened bread, and they ate.*

"The two angels came to Sodom in the evening." The LORD had stayed behind with Abraham (18:22). These two came to see whether the outcry against Sodom was true (18:21).

"Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom." The city gate was where the leaders and judges of a town sat to do business and settle disputes. Lot was no longer living near Sodom. He was one of its leading men. His slide toward Sodom (13:12; 14:12) was complete.

Lot showed hospitality, as Abraham had. He bowed, offered to wash their feet, and urged them strongly to stay in his house, not in the town square. He knew what could happen to strangers outside at night in Sodom. Peter calls Lot righteous and says he was tormented by the lawless deeds he saw and heard day after day (2 Peter 2:7-8). Lot believed in God. But he had chosen to live where his soul was constantly vexed.

New Testament links: Hebrews 13:2 (alluded to)

19:4-5 *Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, from young man even to old man, all the people from **every** end. And they called to Lot and said to him, "Where **are** the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, and let us know them."*

"The men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house." Moses stresses that the whole city took part. They did not find even ten righteous men (18:32).

They demanded, "Bring them out to us, and let us know them." "Know" is a Hebrew way of speaking about sexual intercourse. The men of Sodom wanted to gang rape the visitors.

What was the sin of Sodom? Part of it was this homosexual violence, which Jude 7 describes as going after other flesh. But Ezekiel 16:49-50 adds more: Sodom had arrogance, plenty of food and careless ease, and did not help the poor and needy. They were proud and did detestable things before God. Sodom's sin was a whole way of life that had turned away from God, a mix of pride, selfishness, cruelty and sexual sin.

We need to be honest about what Scripture teaches here, and we need to be humble too. None of us stands before God by our own goodness. The gospel is for sinners of every kind, including us (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

New Testament links: Jude 1:7 (alluded to)

19:6-8 *And Lot went out to them, to the entrance, and the door he shut behind him, and he said, "Please, my brothers, do not do evil. Look, please, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them as* ***is*** *good in your eyes; only to these men do not do anything, for because of this they have come under the shadow of my roof."*

Lot went outside and shut the door behind him. "Please, my brothers, do not do evil." He knew it was evil. He called them "brothers," a sign of how much he had become part of that city.

Then Lot offered his two daughters to the mob in place of his guests. It is hard to read. In the ancient world, a host's duty to protect his guests was very strong, and Lot appealed to that: "they have come under the shadow of my roof." But nothing excuses offering his own daughters to be abused.

Lot is an example of how living in a wicked place for a long time can twist a believer's judgment. He wanted to do right by his guests, and he was willing to do great wrong to his own children to do it. God did not let his offer be carried out.

19:9-11 *And they said, "Draw back!" And they said, "This one came to sojourn, and he keeps judging! Now we will do evil to you more than to them." And they pressed hard against the man, against Lot, exceedingly, and they drew near to break the door. And the men stretched out their hand and brought Lot to them into the house, and they shut the door. And the men who* ***were at*** *the entrance of the house they struck with blindness, from small even to great, and they wearied* ***themselves*** *to find the entrance.*

"Draw back!" The mob turned on Lot. "This one came to sojourn, and he keeps judging!" To them he was still an outsider. Lot had given his life to Sodom, and Sodom never really accepted him. The world rarely loves the believer who tries to fit in.

They "pressed hard against the man, against Lot" and nearly broke down the door. "And the men stretched out their hand and brought Lot to them into the house." The visitors Lot had tried to protect ended up protecting him.

"The men who were at the entrance of the house they struck with blindness." Even then, the men of Sodom kept groping for the door until they wore themselves out. Their lust was stronger than their fear. Sin can blind people long before any physical blindness falls.

19:12-14 *And the men said to Lot, "Whom else do you have here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and all whom you have in the city, bring* ***them*** *out from the place; for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become great before the face of the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it." And Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who* ***were*** *taking his daughters, and he said, "Arise, go out from this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city." And he was like one who jests in the eyes of his sons-in-law.*

Now the angels told Lot why they had come: "we are about to destroy this place." The outcry had reached the LORD, and the investigation was over.

God gave Lot the chance to save his family. "Whom else do you have here?" Lot went to the men who were engaged to his daughters. "Arise, go out from this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But "he was like one who jests in the eyes of his sons-in-law."

It is a sad line. Lot had lived in Sodom so long that his warnings meant nothing. His life had not backed up his words. When he finally spoke about God's judgment, no one took him seriously. Our witness is built over years. When the time comes to speak, people will judge our words by our lives.

19:15-16 *And when the dawn came up, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are found **here**, lest you be swept away in the iniquity of the city." And he lingered, and the men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hand of his two daughters, in the compassion of the LORD on him; and they brought him out and set him outside the city.*

At dawn the angels urged Lot to hurry. "And he lingered." Even with judgment about to fall, Lot did not want to leave. His house, his wealth and his position were all in Sodom.

"The men seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hand of his two daughters." The angels took them by the hand and pulled them out. Why? It was "in the compassion of the LORD on him." Lot was not rescued because he was quick to obey. He was rescued because God was merciful.

That is how salvation works. None of us runs to God on our own. He reaches out and takes hold of us. The compassion of the LORD is the only reason any of us is saved.

19:17-22 *And it happened, when they had brought them outside, and he said, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stop in all the district; escape to the mountain, lest you be swept away." And Lot said to them, "Not so, please, Lord! Look, please, Your servant has found favor in Your eyes, and You have made great Your steadfast love which You have done with me by keeping my soul alive; and I am not able to escape to the mountain, lest the disaster cling to me and I die. Look, please, this city **is** near to flee there, and it **is** a little **one**; please let me escape there (is it not a little **one**?), and my soul will live." And He said to him, "Look, I have lifted up your face also concerning this matter, not to overthrow the city of which you have spoken. Hurry, escape there, for I am not able to do anything until you come there." Therefore **one** called the name of the city Zoar.*

"Escape for your life! Do not look behind you." The command was clear: flee to the mountains and do not look back.

Lot argued. "Not so, please, Lord!" He was afraid of the mountains and asked to go to a small town nearby instead. Even in his rescue, Lot was bargaining for a little piece of the life he was leaving. The angel granted the request, and the town was called Zoar, which means small.

"I am not able to do anything until you come there." God held back His judgment until Lot was safe. Peter uses this story to show that the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to keep the wicked for judgment (2 Peter 2:6-9). As with Enoch (5:24), I believe this is also a picture of what God will do for His church: He will take His people out before the judgments of the Tribulation fall (1 Thessalonians 1:10; Revelation 3:10).

New Testament links: Luke 17:31 (alluded to)

19:23-25 *The sun had come out over the earth, and Lot came to Zoar. And the LORD rained on Sodom and on Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of the heavens. And He overthrew these cities, and all the district, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and the growth of the ground.*

"The sun had come out over the earth, and Lot came to Zoar." The morning looked normal. Then "the LORD rained on Sodom and on Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of the heavens." Sulfur, which older translations call brimstone, burns with fierce heat. The fire came from God, not from chance.

"He overthrew these cities, and all the district." The well-watered valley Lot had chosen because it looked like the garden of the LORD (13:10) was gone in a morning.

Genesis is silent on the means. Some suggest He used natural forces in that region, like the oil and tar pits (14:10) and gases there. Whatever means He used, the text is clear that it was His judgment. The exact location of Sodom is also debated. Many place it near the southern end of the Dead Sea, and some scholars suggest sites to the north.

Jesus pointed to this day as a picture of His return. People were eating, drinking, buying and building, and then judgment fell (Luke 17:28-30). Sodom is a warning in Scripture that God's judgment on sin is real (Jude 7).

New Testament links: 2 Peter 2:6 (alluded to); Jude 1:7 (alluded to); Revelation 14:10 (alluded to); Matthew 11:23 (alluded to); Luke 17:29 (alluded to)

19:26 *And his wife looked from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.*

"And his wife looked from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." She was out of the city, but her heart was still in it. She did not simply glance back. She disobeyed a clear command because she longed for what she was leaving.

Jesus gave a short warning: "Remember the wife of Lot" (Luke 17:32). He was warning His followers not to cling to this world when He returns. It is possible to be very close to rescue and still be lost because our hearts are tied to what God is judging.

New Testament links: Luke 17:32 (alluded to)

19:27-29 *And Abraham rose early in the morning **and went** to the place where he had stood there before the face of the LORD. And he looked down over the face of Sodom and Gomorrah, and over all the face of the land of the district, and he saw, and look, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of the furnace. And it happened, when God destroyed the cities of the district, and God remembered Abraham, and He sent Lot out from the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot had dwelt.*

Abraham got up early and went back to "the place where he had stood there before the face of the LORD," where he had prayed the day before. He "looked down over the face of Sodom," and he saw that "the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of the furnace." There were not ten righteous people in the city.

Then verse 29 tells us why Lot was saved: "God remembered Abraham, and He sent Lot out from the midst of the overthrow." Abraham's prayers were answered, not in the way he asked, but in the way that mattered most to him. Lot was saved because of God's mercy and Abraham's prayer.

Your prayers for others matter. You may not see the answer, but God hears. Lot never knew his uncle had stood before the LORD for him.

New Testament links: Revelation 9:2 (alluded to); 2 Peter 2:7 (alluded to); 2 Peter 2:6 (alluded to)

19:30 *And Lot went up from Zoar and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar; and he dwelt in the cave, he and his two daughters.*

Lot left Zoar, the town he had begged to go to, because he was afraid to stay there. He ended up in the mountains after all, where the angel had first told him to go.

Look at how far Lot had fallen. He came into the land a rich man with flocks and herds and tents (13:5). He chose the best land, lived in a fine city, and sat in its gate. Now he lived in a cave with two daughters, and everything else was gone. His wife was a pillar of salt. His sons-in-law were dead. Choices that look wise by sight can end in ruin.

19:31-35 *And the firstborn said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is no man in the earth to come in to us according to the way of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him, so that we may preserve seed from our father." And they made their father drink wine that night, and the firstborn went in and lay with her father; and he did not know when she lay down and when she arose. And it happened on the next day, and the firstborn said to the younger, "Look, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and go in, lie with him, so that we may preserve seed from our father." And they made their father drink wine that night also, and the younger arose and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down and when she arose.*

The chapter ends with one more sin. Lot's daughters thought "there is no man in the earth to come in to us." They feared they would never have children and their family line would end. So they made their father drunk on two nights and each lay with him, and he did not know it.

This was incest, a sexual relationship between close relatives, and God later forbade it plainly in the Law (Leviticus 18:6-7). Their sin was real, and Scripture does not excuse it. But we should remember what these young women had just lived through. Their own father had offered them to a mob, their mother was dead, and the men they were to marry had died in the city. Fear and despair drove them to a terrible plan. Lot himself is not excused. His drunkenness left him open to shame, much like Noah's (9:20-21).

Moses tells this plainly but briefly. It is a sad end to the story of a man who started his journey alongside Abraham.

If your own family has been a place of abuse, please hear this: the shame belongs to the one who did the wrong, and you do not have to carry it alone. Talk with a pastor, a trusted counselor or the proper authorities. We will come back to this in chapter 34.

19:36-38 *And the two daughters of Lot conceived from their father. And the firstborn bore a son, and she called his name Moab; he **is** the father of Moab to this day. And the younger, she also bore a son, and she called his name Ben-ammi; he **is** the father of the sons of Ammon to this day.*

Both daughters became pregnant. The older one named her son Moab, and the younger named hers Ben-ammi. Their descendants became the Moabites and the Ammonites, nations that lived east of the Jordan and were often enemies of Israel.

Yet God's grace shows up even here. Generations later, a Moabite woman named Ruth trusted the God of Israel, married Boaz, and became the great-grandmother of King David (Ruth 4:13-17). She is named in the family line of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). From this dark story, God brought a woman who would be part of the line of the Savior. No family history is too broken for God's grace to reach.

Chapter 19 Summary

The two angels came to Sodom, where Lot sat in the city gate. Lot brought them into his house, but the men of the city surrounded it and demanded the visitors so they could abuse them. Lot shamefully offered his daughters instead, and the angels struck the mob with blindness. The angels warned Lot to take his family and leave, but his sons-in-law thought he was joking. At dawn Lot hesitated, and the angels took him, his wife and his daughters by the hand and brought them out, because of the LORD's compassion. Lot begged to go to the small town of Zoar. Then the LORD rained fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed the cities of the valley. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Abraham saw the smoke rising, and God, remembering Abraham, had rescued Lot. Lot moved into a cave with his daughters, who made him drunk and conceived by him. Their sons became the fathers of the Moabites and the Ammonites. The chapter shows both God's judgment on sin and His mercy.

People and Places

- Sodom and Gomorrah: wicked cities in the valley near the Dead Sea that God destroyed.
- Zoar: a small town near Sodom where Lot fled; its name means small.

- Moab: Lot's son by his older daughter; father of the Moabites.
- Ben-ammi: Lot's son by his younger daughter; father of the Ammonites.

Chapter 19 Study Questions

1. Where was Lot sitting when the angels arrived, and what does that tell us about him? (19:1)

2. Lot tried to protect his guests but offered his own daughters to the mob (19:4-8). How do you think years in Sodom had twisted his judgment?

3. According to Ezekiel 16:49-50 and Jude 7, what were the sins of Sodom?

4. How did Lot's sons-in-law react to his warning, and why? (19:14)

5. Why did the angels take Lot and his family by the hand? (19:16)

6. Jesus said, "Remember the wife of Lot" (Luke 17:32). What was He warning His followers about, and why is that warning still needed? (19:26)

7. According to 19:29, why did God rescue Lot?

8. How does the story of Ruth show God's grace to the descendants of Moab?

9. Lot's warnings meant nothing to his sons-in-law because of how he had lived. What does your life say to the people who hear you talk about God?

10. Is there anything in this world your heart is still looking back toward? What would it look like to let it go?

Chapter 20: Abraham and Abimelech

Scripture

20:1-7 And Abraham set out from there toward the land of the Negeb, and he dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and he sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said concerning Sarah his wife, "She ***is*** my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. And God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night and said to him, "Look, you ***are*** about to die because of the woman whom you have taken, and she ***is*** married to a husband." And Abimelech had not come near her. And he said, "Lord, will You kill even a righteous nation? Did he not ***himself*** say to me, 'She ***is*** my sister'? And she, she also said, 'He ***is*** my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and in the innocence of my hands I have done this." And God said to him in a dream, "I also know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. And now return the wife of the man, for he ***is*** a prophet, and he will pray for you, and live. And if you do not return ***her***, know that you will surely die, you and all who ***are*** yours."

20:8-18 And Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants, and he spoke all these words in their ears; and the men were exceedingly afraid. And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? Deeds which ought not to be done you have done to me." And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you have done this thing?" And Abraham said, "Because I said, 'Surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me on account of my wife.' And also she truly ***is*** my sister, the daughter of my father, only not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it happened, when God caused me to wander from the house of my father, and I said to her, 'This ***is*** your steadfast love which you will do for me: to every place where we come, say of me, "He ***is*** my brother."'" And Abimelech took sheep and cattle and ***male*** servants and female servants, and he gave ***them*** to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. And Abimelech said, "Look, my land ***is*** before you; dwell where ***it is*** good in your eyes." And to Sarah he said, "Look, I have given a thousand ***pieces*** of silver to your brother; look, it ***is*** for you a covering of the eyes to all who ***are*** with you, and with everyone; and you are vindicated." And Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maidservants, and they bore ***children***. For the LORD had surely shut up every womb of the house of Abimelech on account of Sarah the wife of Abraham.

Chapter 20 Preview

After the destruction of Sodom, Abraham moves south into the land of the Negeb and stays for a time in Gerar. There he does exactly what he did in Egypt about twenty-five years earlier. He tells people Sarah is his sister, and Abimelech, the king of Gerar, takes her into his household. It all happens just before the promised son is to be born, and the promise is in danger again.

God steps in. He warns Abimelech in a dream that he is a dead man for taking another man's wife, and He keeps Abimelech from touching her. Abimelech confronts Abraham, gives Sarah back with gifts, and Abraham prays for Abimelech's household, and God heals them. Once again an

outsider shows more integrity than Abraham, and once again God remains faithful when His servant fails.

Chapter 20 Study

20:1 *And Abraham set out from there toward the land of the Negeb, and he dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and he sojourned in Gerar.*

"Abraham set out from there toward the land of the Negeb." Why did he move after living at Mamre for many years? Maybe for pasture. Maybe he did not want to live within sight of the place where Sodom's smoke had risen (19:28).

He "sojourned in Gerar," living there as a foreigner. To sojourn means to live somewhere as a temporary resident, a foreigner without full rights. Gerar was a town in the southwest of Canaan, between Gaza and Beersheba. Abraham was still a traveler, living in a land God had promised him but that he did not yet own.

20:2 *And Abraham said concerning Sarah his wife, "She **is** my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.*

"Abraham said concerning Sarah his wife, 'She is my sister.'" It is the same lie he told in Egypt (12:13). He had failed this way before, and God had rescued him. He had walked with God for many more years since then. He had seen God appear, make covenants, and promise a son through Sarah within a year (18:10). Yet the old fear came back.

That should humble every believer. Old sins can return, even after great spiritual experiences. A victory in one season does not mean we cannot fall the same way again. We need God's grace every day.

"And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah." Abimelech may have been a title for kings of Gerar, much like Pharaoh in Egypt. Sarah was about ninety. We are not told why the king wanted her. It may have been her beauty, or a wish to make an alliance with a wealthy chief like Abraham. Either way, the mother of the promised son was now in a pagan king's house.

20:3 *And God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night and said to him, "Look, you **are** about to die because of the woman whom you have taken, and she **is** married to a husband."*

"And God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night." God spoke to a pagan king. He is not limited to His own people. He rules over kings and nations, whether they know Him or not.

"You are about to die because of the woman whom you have taken, and she is married to a husband." God took marriage seriously. Taking another man's wife was a sin worthy of death, even if done in ignorance. God's standard for marriage was His law for all people, not just Israel's custom.

God was also protecting His promise. Isaac was about to be conceived. There could be no doubt about who his father was.

20:4-5 *And Abimelech had not come near her. And he said, "Lord, will You kill even a righteous nation? Did he not **himself** say to me, 'She **is** my sister'? And she, she also said, 'He **is** my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and in the innocence of my hands I have done this."*

"Abimelech had not come near her." He had not yet slept with Sarah. He pleaded his case: "Lord, will You kill even a righteous nation?" He used words much like Abraham's in 18:23-25, asking whether God would destroy the innocent.

Abimelech had a good argument. Abraham said she was his sister. Sarah said Abraham was her brother. "In the integrity of my heart and in the innocence of my hands I have done this." He had acted in good faith, based on what they told him. He had been deceived by the very people who should have been most honest.

Sarah went along with the lie. Abraham's sin drew his wife into sin too. When a husband leads his family in the wrong direction, they often follow.

20:6-7 *And God said to him in a dream, "I also know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. And now return the wife of the man, for he **is** a prophet, and he will pray for you, and live. And if you do not return **her**, know that you will surely die, you and all who **are** yours."*

God agreed: "I also know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this." God judges the heart. He knew Abimelech had not meant to do wrong.

"I also withheld you from sinning against Me." That was a hidden mercy. God had held Abimelech back. Verse 17 suggests God did this by sending some kind of illness on his household. We do not know how many times God has kept us from sin in ways we never noticed. His restraining grace is at work far more than we realize.

"Return the wife of the man, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and live." The word "prophet" appears here for the first time in the Bible, and it is used of Abraham in the middle of one of his failures. A prophet is someone God speaks to and through. Abraham's calling did not depend on his perfection. God's choice of Abraham rested on grace, not performance. Even so, the man who prays for others is the very man who caused the trouble.

20:8 *And Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants, and he spoke all these words in their ears; and the men were exceedingly afraid.*

"Abimelech rose early in the morning." He did not wait. He called his servants and told them everything, and "the men were exceedingly afraid."

In chapter 19, Lot warned his sons-in-law about God's judgment, and they laughed. Here, a pagan king hears from God, and his whole court takes it seriously. The people of Gerar showed more fear of God than Abraham expected them to have.

20:9-10 *And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? Deeds which ought not to be done you have done to me." And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you have done this thing?"*

Abimelech called Abraham in and asked, "What have you done to us?" He named the danger: Abraham had brought "a great sin" on him and his kingdom. He told Abraham, "Deeds which ought not to be done you have done to me."

It is a painful scene. The man of God is rebuked by a man who did not know God, and the rebuke is right. When believers act dishonestly, the world sees it, and it brings shame on the name of the LORD.

"What did you see, that you have done this thing?" Abimelech wanted to know why. What had Abraham seen in Gerar that made him think he had to lie?

20:11-13 *And Abraham said, "Because I said, 'Surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me on account of my wife.' And also she truly **is** my sister, the daughter of my father, only not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it happened, when God caused me to wander from the house of my father, and I said to her, 'This **is** your steadfast love which you will do for me: to every place where we come, say of me, "He **is** my brother."'"*

Abraham gave three answers. First: "I said, 'Surely there is no fear of God in this place.'" He assumed the worst about these people. He was wrong. They feared God more than he did in that moment. We can be quick to think we are the only ones who take God seriously.

Second: "she truly is my sister, the daughter of my father, only not the daughter of my mother." That was technically true. But a half-truth told to mislead is still a lie.

Third: this was an old agreement. When "God caused me to wander from the house of my father," Abraham had asked Sarah to say he was her brother wherever they went. So the plan had been in place all along, since they left home. Abraham had never let it go. Fear had a long-standing hiding place in his heart.

Abraham's answers are honest about the past, but there is no clear word of repentance. His son Isaac will later tell the very same lie in this very same town (26:6-11). Unconfessed patterns tend to be passed down.

20:14-16 *And Abimelech took sheep and cattle and **male** servants and female servants, and he gave **them** to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. And Abimelech said, "Look, my land **is** before you; dwell where **it is** good in your eyes." And to Sarah he said, "Look, I have given a thousand **pieces** of silver to your brother; look, it **is** for you a covering of the eyes to all who **are** with you, and with everyone; and you are vindicated."*

Abimelech gave Abraham sheep, oxen and servants and returned Sarah to him. He also offered, "Look, my land is before you; dwell where it is good in your eyes." That was generous, far more than Abraham deserved.

To Sarah he said he had given her "brother" a thousand pieces of silver. The word "brother" may carry a gentle sting. The silver was "a covering of the eyes," a public statement that Sarah had done nothing wrong with the king and that her honor was clear. "You are vindicated."

God protected Sarah's name as well as her body. When Isaac was born, no one could question who his father was.

20:17-18 *And Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maidservants, and they bore **children**. For the LORD had surely shut up every womb of the house of Abimelech on account of Sarah the wife of Abraham.*

"Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maidservants, and they bore children." Moses explains: "the LORD had surely shut up every womb of the house of Abimelech." This was a specific act of God to protect Sarah and the promise. It does not mean that a couple who cannot have children today is under God's judgment (see 11:30).

There is something striking here. Abraham prayed that God would open the wombs of another man's household, while his own wife was still barren. He had to pray for someone else to receive what he himself had waited twenty-five years for. And God answered. The next chapter opens with God doing for Sarah what He had just done for Abimelech's household.

The chapter shows God's faithfulness more than Abraham's. Abraham failed. Sarah went along. But God protected the promise, warned the king, restored the wife, and used even Abraham's failure to show His grace. If God waited for perfect people, He would never use anyone. He keeps His promises because of who He is, not because of who we are.

Chapter 20 Summary

Abraham moved south and stayed in Gerar. There he again said Sarah was his sister, and Abimelech king of Gerar took her. God came to Abimelech in a dream and warned him that he was a dead man because Sarah was married. Abimelech had not touched her and pleaded his innocence, and God said He had kept him from sinning. God told him to return Sarah, because Abraham was a prophet who would pray for him. Abimelech confronted Abraham, who said he thought there was no fear of God in Gerar, that Sarah really was his half sister, and that they had agreed to say this wherever they went. Abimelech gave Abraham gifts, offered him land, and gave silver to clear Sarah's name. Abraham prayed, and God healed Abimelech's household so they could have children again, because the LORD had closed their wombs on account of Sarah.

People and Places

- Gerar: a town in the western Negeb, inland from Gaza, between Gaza and Beersheba.
- Abimelech: the king of Gerar; the name may have been a royal title, as Pharaoh was in Egypt.

Chapter 20 Study Questions

1. Where did Abraham go at the start of this chapter, and what did he say about Sarah? (20:1-2)

2. Abraham had told this same half-truth in Egypt (12:10-20). Why do you think God protected him again instead of letting him face the results?

3. What did God tell Abimelech in the dream? (20:3)

4. Abimelech acted in good faith, and God spoke to him and held him back from sin (20:4-6). What does this show about how God deals with people who do not yet know Him?

5. What did God call Abraham, and what did He say Abraham would do? (20:7)

6. What three reasons did Abraham give for what he did? (20:11-13)

7. Why do you think Abimelech was so generous, and what did his silver say about Sarah? (20:14-16)

8. What happened when Abraham prayed, and why had the women of Abimelech's house been unable to have children? (20:17-18)

9. Abraham repeated an old sin after many years of walking with God. Is there an old pattern of sin you need to watch for and confess?

10. Abraham assumed there was "no fear of God" in Gerar and was wrong. Are there people you have written off as far from God? How might God be at work in them?

Chapter 21: The Birth of Isaac

Scripture

21:1-7 And the LORD visited Sarah just as He had said, and the LORD did to Sarah just as He had spoken. And Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time which God had spoken ***of*** with him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised Isaac his son, a son of eight days, just as God had commanded him. And Abraham ***was*** a son of a hundred years when Isaac his son was born to him. And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh for me." And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham, 'Sarah has nursed children'? For I have borne a son in his old age."

21:8-21 And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. And she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maidservant and her son, for the son of this maidservant shall not inherit with my son, with Isaac." And the matter was very bad in the eyes of Abraham on account of his son. And God said to Abraham, "Let it not be bad in your eyes concerning the lad and concerning your maidservant. All that Sarah says to you, listen to her voice, for in Isaac seed will be called for you. And also the son of the maidservant I will make into a nation, for he ***is*** your seed." And Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave ***them*** to Hagar, putting ***them*** on her shoulder, and the child, and he sent her away. And she went and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. And the water in the skin was used up, and she threw the child under one of the bushes. And she went and sat down by herself opposite ***him***, at a distance about a bowshot, for she said, "Let me not look on the death of the child." And she sat opposite ***him***, and she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad, and the angel of God called to Hagar from the heavens and said to her, "What ***is it*** to you, Hagar? Do not be afraid, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he ***is*** there. Arise, lift up the lad and make your hand firm on him, for I will make him into a great nation." And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin ***with*** water and gave the lad a drink. And God was with the lad, and he grew; and he dwelt in the wilderness, and he became a shooter, a bowman. And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

21:22-34 And it happened at that time, and Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, saying, "God ***is*** with you in all that you are doing. And now swear to me by God here that you will not deal falsely with me, and with my offspring, and with my posterity; according to the steadfast love that I have done with you, you will do with me and with the land in which you have sojourned." And Abraham said, "I, I will swear." And Abraham reproved Abimelech on account of the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized. And Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; and also you did not tell me, and also I, I have not heard ***of it*** except today." And Abraham took sheep and cattle and gave ***them*** to Abimelech, and the two of them cut a covenant. And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What ***are*** they, these seven ewe lambs which you have set by themselves?" And he said, "For seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, so that it

may be for me a witness that I dug this well." Therefore he called that place Beersheba, for there the two of them swore. And they cut a covenant at Beersheba; and Abimelech arose, and Phicol the commander of his army, and they returned to the land of the Philistines. And he planted a tamarisk in Beersheba, and he called there on the name of the LORD, the God of eternity. And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines many days.

Chapter 21 Preview

Twenty-five years after God first called Abraham out of Haran, the promised son is finally born. Sarah is ninety, Abraham is one hundred, and the baby they name Isaac, which means "he laughs," fills their tent with joy. God kept His word exactly as He said He would, at the very time He had set.

Joy is followed by pain. Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar, mocks the young Isaac, and Sarah demands that Hagar and her son be sent away. Abraham is grieved, but God tells him to listen, and God Himself cares for Hagar and the boy in the wilderness. The chapter closes on a quieter note, with Abraham making a peace treaty with King Abimelech at a well called Beersheba and calling on the name of the LORD, the God of eternity.

Chapter 21 Study

21:1-2 *And the LORD visited Sarah just as He had said, and the LORD did to Sarah just as He had spoken. And Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time which God had spoken **of** with him.*

The first verse says the same thing twice: the LORD did "just as He had said," and He did "just as He had spoken." Moses wants us to see that this birth came from God's word, not from human effort. Abraham and Sarah had tried to help God along with Hagar in chapter 16, and it brought nothing but trouble. Now God does what only He can do.

The birth came "at the appointed time." A year earlier the LORD had told Abraham that Sarah would have a son at this season (18:14). Abraham waited twenty-five years. God's timing often feels slow to us, but He is never late in keeping His promises.

Isaac's birth was part of God's unique plan for the promised line, as I said at 11:30, and not a promise that every couple who prays will have a child. But it shows that God keeps His word, even when the wait is long.

New Testament links: Galatians 4:22 (alluded to); Hebrews 11:11 (alluded to)

21:3-5 *And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised Isaac his son, a son of eight days, just as God had commanded him. And Abraham **was** a son of a hundred years when Isaac his son was born to him.*

Abraham obeyed in two ways. He gave the boy the name God had chosen, Isaac (17:19). And he circumcised him on the eighth day, "as God had commanded him." Circumcision was the sign of

God's covenant with Abraham (17:10-12). Isaac was the son of the promise, and he received the sign of the promise.

Moses repeats Abraham's age: "a son of a hundred years." Paul speaks of Abraham's body as "already having become dead" by then (Romans 4:19), and so was Sarah's womb. Isaac's birth was a miracle. Paul uses it to show that saving faith trusts the God who gives life to the dead.

New Testament links: Acts 7:8 (alluded to)

21:6-7 *And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh for me." And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham, 'Sarah has nursed children'? For I have borne a son in his old age."*

A year earlier Sarah had laughed in unbelief behind the tent door (18:12). Now she laughs for joy. "God has made laughter for me," she says. The name Isaac means "he laughs," and every time she called her son she would remember both laughs: her doubt and God's faithfulness.

Sarah also says that "everyone who hears will laugh for me." She expected others to share her joy. When God does something wonderful for one of His children, it is meant to be told. Her question in verse 7 has a simple answer: nobody would have said it. Only God could say it, and only God could do it.

21:8-10 *And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. And she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maidservant and her son, for the son of this maidservant shall not inherit with my son, with Isaac."*

Children in the ancient world were usually nursed for two or three years, and weaning was a time to celebrate that a child had made it through the dangerous early years. Abraham threw "a great feast."

At that feast Sarah saw Ishmael "mocking." Ishmael was Abraham's son by Hagar, the Egyptian servant Sarah had given to Abraham (16:1-4). Since Abraham was eighty-six when Ishmael was born (16:16), Ishmael was now a teenager, around sixteen or seventeen. We aren't told exactly what he said or did. The word is related to Isaac's name, so it seems he was making fun of the child and the promise his name stood for. Paul later describes it as the son of the flesh persecuting the son of the Spirit (Galatians 4:29).

Sarah's response was hard. She would not call them by name, only "this maidservant and her son." Her concern was the inheritance: Ishmael "shall not inherit with my son, with Isaac." An heir is the one who receives the father's property and blessing.

Paul quotes Sarah's words in Galatians 4:30 and calls them Scripture: "Cast out the slave woman and her son." He uses them to show that those who try to be right with God by keeping the Law will not share the inheritance with those who trust God's promise.

New Testament links: Galatians 4:30 (quoted); Galatians 4:29 (alluded to)

21:11-13 *And the matter was very bad in the eyes of Abraham on account of his son. And God said to Abraham, "Let it not be bad in your eyes concerning the lad and concerning your maidservant. All that Sarah says to you, listen to her voice, for in Isaac seed will be called for you. And also the son of the maidservant I will make into a nation, for he **is** your seed."*

The matter "was very bad in the eyes of Abraham," because Ishmael was his son too. He loved the boy. This whole painful scene grew out of the plan in chapter 16, when Abraham and Sarah tried to get the promised child their own way. Taking a second wife, even a servant given as a wife, went against God's pattern of one man and one woman (2:24), and here we see the grief it brought to everyone involved.

God told Abraham to listen to Sarah, not because her anger was right, but because the line of promise would come through Isaac: "in Isaac seed will be called for you." Paul quotes this in Romans 9:7 to show that being a child of God's promise is a matter of God's choice, not physical descent.

God did not forget Ishmael. "And also the son of the maidservant I will make into a nation, for he is your seed." God's choice of Isaac did not mean He had no love for Ishmael.

Hebrews 11:18 quotes the same words, "In Isaac your seed will be called," to show how great Abraham's faith was when God later asked him to offer Isaac.

New Testament links: Romans 9:7 (quoted); Hebrews 11:18 (quoted)

21:14-16 *And Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave **them** to Hagar, putting **them** on her shoulder, and the child, and he sent her away. And she went and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. And the water in the skin was used up, and she threw the child under one of the bushes. And she went and sat down by herself opposite **him**, at a distance about a bowshot, for she said, "Let me not look on the death of the child." And she sat opposite **him**, and she lifted up her voice and wept.*

"Abraham rose early in the morning." He did not argue or delay. He gave Hagar bread and a skin of water, and sent her and the boy away. It was very little for a mother and son facing the desert. Abraham obeyed God, but Hagar paid the cost.

Hagar "wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba," the dry country in the far south of Canaan. When the water ran out, she put the boy under a bush for shade and sat down "at a distance about a bowshot," so she would not have to watch him die. Then she wept. A mother who had been used, then pushed out, now sits in the desert expecting to lose her son. If you have ever felt cast aside by people who should have cared for you, Hagar's story is for you, because of what comes next.

21:17-19 *And God heard the voice of the lad, and the angel of God called to Hagar from the heavens and said to her, "What **is it** to you, Hagar? Do not be afraid, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he **is** there. Arise, lift up the lad and make your hand firm on him, for I will make him into a great nation." And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin **with** water and gave the lad a drink.*

"God heard the voice of the lad." The name Ishmael means "God hears" (16:11). God had named the boy for this very moment. Hagar was the one weeping out loud, yet Scripture says God heard the boy. His name was a promise, and God kept it.

The angel of God called from heaven and said, "Do not be afraid." Just as in chapter 16, God met her in the wilderness. He gave her a command: lift up the boy and hold his hand. And He renewed His promise: "I will make him into a great nation."

Then "God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water." The well may have been there all along. She could not see it through her tears until God showed her. Sometimes the help God provides is closer than we think, and we need Him to open our eyes to see it.

21:20-21 *And God was with the lad, and he grew; and he dwelt in the wilderness, and he became a shooter, a bowman. And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.*

"God was with the lad." That short sentence is a comfort. Ishmael was not the son of promise, but he was not forgotten. He grew up in the wilderness and became an archer, a man who lived by his bow, just as the angel had said he would be a wild and independent man (16:12).

He settled in "the wilderness of Paran," the desert region south of Canaan in the Sinai Peninsula. His mother found him a wife from Egypt, her own homeland. Genesis 25:12-18 will list his twelve sons, who became tribal princes, just as God promised (17:20). God kept every word He spoke about Ishmael.

21:22-24 *And it happened at that time, and Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, saying, "God **is** with you in all that you are doing. And now swear to me by God here that you will not deal falsely with me, and with my offspring, and with my posterity; according to the steadfast love that I have done with you, you will do with me and with the land in which you have sojourned." And Abraham said, "I, I will swear."*

The scene shifts to Abimelech, the king of Gerar, whom we met in chapter 20, and "Phicol, the commander of his army." Their visit was friendly, but they brought the general along, which made it clear they meant business.

Abimelech said something remarkable: "God is with you in all that you are doing." Abraham had failed badly in front of this man by lying about Sarah (20:2). Even so, Abimelech could see God's hand on Abraham's life. Our neighbors notice when God is blessing us.

Abimelech asked Abraham to swear not to "deal falsely" with him. After the trouble in chapter 20, that request stung a little, but it was fair. Abraham agreed: "I, I will swear."

21:25-31 *And Abraham reproved Abimelech on account of the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized. And Abimelech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; and also you did not tell me, and also I, I have not heard **of it** except today." And Abraham took sheep and cattle and gave **them** to Abimelech, and the two of them cut a covenant. And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What **are** they, these seven ewe lambs which you have set by themselves?" And he said, "For seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, so that it may be for me a witness that I dug this well." Therefore he called that place Beersheba, for there the two of them swore.*

Before the treaty was made, Abraham raised a problem. Abimelech's servants had seized a well Abraham had dug. In dry country a well was life itself for a herdsman and his flocks. Abimelech said he knew nothing about it, and the two men "cut a covenant," a formal agreement with an oath.

Abraham then set aside seven ewe lambs, young female sheep, and gave them to Abimelech as "a witness" that the well was his. By accepting the lambs, Abimelech publicly agreed that Abraham had dug it.

The place was named Beersheba. In Hebrew, "beer" means "well," and "sheba" sounds like both "seven" and "oath." It is the well of the seven, and the well of the oath. Beersheba later marked the southern edge of the land of Israel, as in the phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" (Judges 20:1).

21:32-34 *And they cut a covenant at Beersheba; and Abimelech arose, and Phicol the commander of his army, and they returned to the land of the Philistines. And he planted a tamarisk in Beersheba, and he called there on the name of the LORD, the God of eternity. And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines many days.*

Abimelech and Phicol went home to "the land of the Philistines." We aren't told how these early Philistines were related to the larger Philistine nation of later times. Many scholars think the name is used for the people who lived in that coastal area.

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree, a hardy desert tree that gives good shade and lives a long time. It was a sign that he meant to stay. And "he called there on the name of the LORD, the God of eternity." The Hebrew is El Olam. Abraham had just made a treaty with a king, but his real security rested in the God who never changes and never dies.

"Many days" Abraham lived there as a sojourner (20:1). He owned a well but not the land. Hebrews 11:9-10 says he lived in tents in the land of promise because he was looking for a city whose builder is God. Believers today live the same way. We are at home with God, and only passing through this world.

Chapter 21 Summary

God kept His promise and gave Abraham and Sarah a son in their old age, at the very time He had said. They named him Isaac, "he laughs," and Sarah's laughter of doubt turned to laughter of joy. At Isaac's weaning feast, Ishmael mocked him, and Sarah demanded that Hagar and her son be

driven out. Abraham was grieved, but God told him to listen, because the line of promise would come through Isaac, and God promised to make Ishmael a nation too. In the wilderness, when the water ran out, God heard the boy, opened Hagar's eyes to a well, and stayed with Ishmael as he grew. Abraham then made a covenant with Abimelech at Beersheba, the well of the oath, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the God of eternity.

People and Places

- Beersheba: well of seven, or well of the oath, in the far south of Canaan; later the southern edge of Israel.
- Phicol: the commander of Abimelech's army.
- Wilderness of Paran: the desert south of Canaan where Ishmael settled.
- El Olam: "the God of eternity," the name Abraham called on at Beersheba (21:33).

Chapter 21 Study Questions

1. Abraham waited twenty-five years for Isaac (12:4; 21:5). Why do you think God let the promise take so long?

2. What does the name Isaac mean, and why was it a fitting name? (21:3, 6)

3. What did Sarah see at the weaning feast, and what did she demand? (21:9-10)

4. Why was Abraham distressed, and what did God tell him? (21:11-13)

5. What did God promise about Ishmael? (21:13, 18)

6. How did God provide for Hagar and the boy in the wilderness? (21:17-19)

7. Abimelech said, "God is with you in all that you are doing," even after Abraham had lied to him (20:2; 21:22). What do you think he saw, and what do the people around you see in your life?

8. What does the name Beersheba mean, and what happened there? (21:28-31)

9. Hagar's story shows that God hears the cries of the rejected. When have you needed God to "open your eyes" to help that was near? (21:19)

10. Abraham called on "the God of eternity." What part of your life needs to rest on God's unchanging character right now? (21:33)

Chapter 22: The Testing of Abraham

Scripture

22:1-8 And it happened after these things, and God tested Abraham, and He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Take, please, your son, your only ***son***, whom you love, Isaac, and go for yourself to the land of Moriah, and offer him up there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I will tell you." And Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and he took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood of the burnt offering, and he arose and went to the place which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from a distance. And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here by yourselves with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there, and we will worship, and we will return to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and put ***it*** on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife; and the two of them went together. And Isaac said to Abraham his father, and he said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, and where ***is*** the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "God will see to the lamb for Himself for a burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went together.

22:9-19 And they came to the place which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and he bound Isaac his son and put him on the altar, on top of the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. And the angel of the LORD called to him from the heavens and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." And he said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do not do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, and you have not withheld your son, your only ***son***, from Me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and look, a ram behind ***him*** caught in the thicket by its horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place "The LORD Will See," as it is said this day, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be seen." And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second ***time*** from the heavens, and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, that because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only ***son***, that I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which ***is*** on the shore of the sea; and your seed will possess the gate of his enemies. And all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by your seed, because you have listened to My voice." And Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt in Beersheba.

22:20-24 And it happened after these things, and it was told to Abraham, saying, "Look, Milcah, she also has borne sons to Nahor your brother: Uz his firstborn, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram, and Chesed, and Hazo, and Pildash, and Jidlaph, and Bethuel." And Bethuel fathered Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, the brother of Abraham. And his concubine, and her name ***was*** Reumah, and she also bore Tebah, and Gaham, and Tahash, and Maacah.

Chapter 22 Preview

God tells Abraham to take Isaac, the son he waited twenty-five years for, the son every promise depends on, and offer him as a burnt offering on a mountain in the land of Moriah. Abraham obeys. He rises early, travels three days, climbs the mountain with his son, builds the altar and lifts the knife. At the last moment the angel of the LORD stops him, and God provides a ram to die in Isaac's place.

This chapter is about faith that trusts God even when His command makes no sense to us. Many Christians also see in it a picture, painted two thousand years ahead of time, of another Father and another only Son, and of the Lamb God Himself would provide. As we read it, we should see Abraham's faith, and then look past Abraham to the cross.

Chapter 22 Study

22:1 *And it happened after these things, and God tested Abraham, and He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."*

"After these things" points back over the long road of Abraham's life: the call to leave Ur, the famine, the separation from Lot, the covenant, the years of waiting, the birth of Isaac and the sending away of Ishmael. Abraham has grown in faith. Now comes the hardest test of all.

"God tested Abraham." A test is not the same as a temptation. Satan tempts us to draw us into sin (James 1:13-14). God tests us to prove and strengthen our faith, the way fire proves gold (1 Peter 1:6-7). God already knew Abraham's heart. The test was for Abraham's good and for ours, so that his faith would be shown to be real.

Abraham's answer was simple and ready: "Here I am." He did not know yet what God would ask. He was available before he heard the assignment.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:17 (alluded to)

22:2 *And He said, "Take, please, your son, your only **son**, whom you love, Isaac, and go for yourself to the land of Moriah, and offer him up there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I will tell you."*

Every phrase of God's command tightens the grip on Abraham's heart: "Take, please, your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac." Ishmael was gone. Isaac was the only son of promise, the one through whom God said Abraham's descendants would be named (21:12). This is the first time the word "love" appears in the Bible (the "steadfast love" of 19:19 is a different Hebrew word), and it is the love of a father for his only son.

A burnt offering was wholly burned on the altar (8:20). Some peoples of the ancient Near East did sacrifice children to their gods, especially in later centuries (2 Kings 3:27). God would later forbid it in the strongest terms (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31). As we will see, God never intended for Isaac to die. But Abraham did not know that yet. This was a one-time test in God's plan. God will never ask anyone to harm a child or anyone else, and any voice that says so is not from Him.

The name Moriah is mentioned only one other time in Scripture. Solomon built the temple "on the mountain of Moriah" in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 3:1). Many believe that the very ridge where Abraham offered Isaac is where the temple later stood, and not far from where Jesus was crucified.

It is hard to read "your only son, whom you love" without thinking of John 3:16, where God the Father gave His only begotten Son. Abraham was asked to do what God the Father would one day really do.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:17 (alluded to)

22:3-4 *And Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and he took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood of the burnt offering, and he arose and went to the place which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from a distance.*

Abraham "rose early in the morning." There is no argument, no bargaining and no delay. When God had told him to send Ishmael away, he also rose early (21:14). Abraham had learned that delayed obedience is a kind of disobedience.

He saddled the donkey, took two servants and Isaac and split the wood himself. Then came three days of travel. Three days is a long time to think about what you are going to do. Every step was a choice to keep obeying.

"On the third day" Abraham saw the place. In his mind, Isaac had been as good as dead for three days. Hebrews 11:19 says that "he also received him back in a figure." On the third day, the son was given back to the father.

22:5 *And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here by yourselves with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there, and we will worship, and we will return to you."*

Abraham told the servants to wait: "I and the lad will go over there, and we will worship, and we will return to you." He said we, not I. Was Abraham just covering for what he was about to do? Hebrews 11:17-19 answers that. Abraham "reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead." God had promised that Isaac would have descendants. If Isaac died on that mountain, then God would have to raise him. Abraham did not know how God would keep His promise. He only knew that God would.

Abraham also called what he was about to do "worship." Worship is more than singing. At its heart, worship is giving God what He asks, because He is worthy, even when it costs us everything.

22:6-8 *And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and put **it** on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife; and the two of them went together. And Isaac said to Abraham his father, and he said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, and where **is** the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "God will see to the lamb for Himself for a burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went together.*

Abraham laid the wood on Isaac, and he carried the fire and the knife himself. Isaac was old enough to carry a load of wood up a mountain, so he was no small child. His age isn't given. He was strong enough that he could have resisted his old father, but there is no hint that he did. Many see in Isaac, carrying the wood up the hill, a picture of Jesus carrying His own cross (John 19:17).

"And the two of them went together." Moses says this twice (22:6, 8). Father and son walked in step toward the place of sacrifice.

Then Isaac asked the question that must have pierced his father's heart: "where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham answered in faith: "God will see to the lamb for Himself for a burnt offering." Abraham meant that God would see to it. And God did, that day on the mountain with the ram, and later in a far greater way. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). The question Isaac asked is answered in Jesus.

22:9-10 *And they came to the place which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and he bound Isaac his son and put him on the altar, on top of the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.*

The writing slows down, as though Moses wants us to feel every movement. Abraham built the altar. He arranged the wood. He "bound Isaac his son." He laid him on the altar. He stretched out his hand. He took the knife.

Isaac let himself be bound. A young man could have run from a man well over one hundred years old. Isaac's quiet surrender is as remarkable as his father's obedience. He trusted his father, and his father trusted God.

Abraham went all the way. In his heart, the sacrifice was made. James 2:21-22 says Abraham's faith was shown by what he did that day, and that "the faith was working together with his works." Abraham was declared righteous by faith years before (15:6). On Moriah, his works proved his faith was real.

New Testament links: James 2:21 (alluded to)

22:11-12 *And the angel of the LORD called to him from the heavens and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." And he said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do not do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, and you have not withheld your son, your only **son**, from Me."*

"The angel of the LORD called to him from the heavens and said." Abraham's name is spoken twice, urgently: "Abraham, Abraham!" And once again Abraham answers, "Here I am."

Look at how the angel speaks: "you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." He speaks of Himself as the One to whom the offering was being made. As we saw in chapter 16, many believe the angel of the LORD was the Son of God appearing before His birth. If so, the One who stopped Abraham's hand is the One who would one day not be spared Himself.

"Now I know that you fear God." To fear God is to hold Him in such awe and trust that you will obey Him above everything else. God did not learn something new about Abraham that day. The test brought into the open what was true in Abraham's heart.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:19 (alluded to)

22:13-14 *And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and look, a ram behind **him** caught in the thicket by its horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place "The LORD Will See," as it is said this day, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be seen."*

Abraham looked up, and there was a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. He "offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son." The ram died so Isaac could live. This is substitution: one dying in the place of another. It runs all through the Bible, from the animal skins in the garden (3:21) to the Passover lamb, whose blood protected Israel's firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 12), to the cross, where Christ died for sinners, the just for the unjust (1 Peter 3:18).

Abraham named the place "The LORD Will See." In Hebrew this is Yahweh Yireh, sometimes written Jehovah-jireh. Many translations say "will provide," and both are true: God sees our need ahead of time, and He sees to it.

"On the mountain of the LORD it will be seen." Abraham's words look forward. God provided a ram on Moriah that day. On another hill near Jerusalem, God provided the Lamb. Paul says the Father "did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for us all" (Romans 8:32). God stopped Abraham's hand. No one stopped the Father from giving His own Son.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:19 (alluded to)

22:15-18 *And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second **time** from the heavens, and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, that because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only **son**, that I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which **is** on the shore of the sea; and your seed will possess the gate of his enemies. And all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by your seed, because you have listened to My voice."*

The angel of the LORD called a second time. "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD." When people swear an oath, they swear by someone greater. Hebrews 6:13 says that since God could swear by no one greater, "He swore by Himself." This oath makes the promise to Abraham doubly sure.

God repeated and enlarged His covenant promises. Abraham's seed would be as many as the stars and the sand. They would "possess the gate of his enemies," which means they would overcome their enemies, since the city gate was the place of defense and rule.

Then comes the heart of it: "And all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by your seed." The wording here is a little different from 12:3, where "all the families of the earth will be blessed" in Abraham. Either way, the blessing of the nations comes through Abraham's seed, and when Paul quotes the promise he gives it as "In you all the nations will be blessed" (Galatians 3:8). Paul tells us in Galatians 3:16 that the "seed" here points to one Person, Christ. Galatians 3:8 calls this promise the gospel preached ahead of time to Abraham. Every Gentile who has come to faith in Jesus is part of the fulfillment of this verse.

"Because you have listened to My voice." God's covenant with Abraham was unconditional. God had already sworn it by walking alone between the pieces (15:17-18). Abraham's obedience did not earn the promise. It showed that Abraham was the kind of man who truly believed it, and God confirmed what He had already given. I believe these promises still stand, the land included (see 15:18-21).

Hebrews 6:14 quotes this oath: "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And Peter quotes "in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed" in Acts 3:25 (see 12:3).

New Testament links: Acts 3:25 (quoted); Hebrews 6:14 (quoted); Hebrews 11:12 (alluded to); Hebrews 6:13 (alluded to)

22:19 *And Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt in Beersheba.*

Abraham and Isaac came down the mountain together, joined the servants and went home to Beersheba. Moses does not say much more. There was no need. The son was alive, the promise was safe and Abraham's faith had been proved.

Some people wonder why Isaac is not mentioned coming down. Scripture uses "they" for the whole group, and Isaac surely came home with his father. We should not build anything on that silence.

Abraham "dwelt in Beersheba." Life went on. After this great test of faith, Abraham went back to ordinary days. That is how faith works for most of us. The mountaintop tests are few. The daily walk with God is where we live.

22:20-24 *And it happened after these things, and it was told to Abraham, saying, "Look, Milcah, she also has borne sons to Nahor your brother: Uz his firstborn, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram, and Chesed, and Hazo, and Pildash, and Jidlaph, and Bethuel." And Bethuel fathered Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, the brother of Abraham. And his concubine, and her name* ***was*** *Reumah, and she also bore Tebah, and Gaham, and Tahash, and Maacah.*

Back home, news arrived about his family in Mesopotamia. Abraham's brother Nahor, who had stayed behind there, now had a large family: eight sons by his wife Milcah and four more by Reumah, his concubine (a secondary wife; see 16:1-2).

This short family list looks like an interruption, but it sets up what comes next. One name is the key: Bethuel, who "fathered Rebekah." Abraham had just been told that his seed would be as many as the stars. Now we learn that the girl who will become Isaac's wife has already been born. God was preparing the next step of His plan before Abraham even knew to ask.

Chapter 22 Summary

God tested Abraham by telling him to offer Isaac, his only son whom he loved, as a burnt offering in the land of Moriah. Abraham obeyed at once, traveled three days and told his servants that he and the boy would worship and return, because he believed God could raise Isaac from the dead. When Isaac asked where the lamb was, Abraham said God would see to the lamb for Himself. At the altar, as Abraham raised the knife, the angel of the LORD stopped him, and Abraham offered a ram in his son's place. He named the place The LORD Will See. God swore by Himself to bless Abraham, multiply his seed and bless all nations through his seed, which Paul says is Christ. The chapter closes with news of Nahor's family, including Rebekah, Isaac's future wife.

People and Places

- Moriah: the region where Abraham offered Isaac; Mount Moriah in Jerusalem was later the site of Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 3:1).
- Nahor: Abraham's brother, who stayed in Mesopotamia.
- Bethuel: Nahor's son and the father of Rebekah.
- Rebekah: Nahor's granddaughter, who will become Isaac's wife (chapter 24).

Chapter 22 Study Questions

1. What did God tell Abraham to do, and how is Isaac described in the command? (22:2)

2. Abraham rose early and set out without a word of argument. What do you think was going through his mind on the three-day walk? (22:3-4)

3. What did Abraham tell his servants, and what does Hebrews 11:17-19 say he believed? (22:5)

4. What question did Isaac ask, and how did Abraham answer? (22:7-8)

5. What stopped Abraham, and what did the angel of the LORD say Abraham's actions proved? (22:11-12)

6. What did God provide in Isaac's place, and what did Abraham name the place? (22:13-14)

7. What did God swear to Abraham, and how does Paul connect verse 18 to Christ? (22:16-18; Galatians 3:8, 16)

8. The news about Rebekah arrives right after the test (22:23). What does that suggest about how God prepares the next step before we see it?

9. In what ways does this chapter point to God the Father giving His only Son for us?

10. Is there anything in your life you are holding back from God? What would it look like to say "Here I am" and trust Him with it?

Chapter 23: The Death of Sarah

Scripture

23:1-2 And the life of Sarah was a hundred years and twenty years and seven years, the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died in Kiriath-arba, that ***is*** Hebron, in the land of Canaan; and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

23:3-20 And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and he spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, "I ***am*** a sojourner and a resident with you. Give me a possession of a grave with you, and let me bury my dead from before me." And the sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, "Hear us, my lord: you ***are*** a prince of God in our midst. In the choicest of our graves bury your dead; none of us will withhold his grave from you, from burying your dead." And Abraham rose and bowed down to the people of the land, to the sons of Heth. And he spoke with them, saying, "If it is your desire to bury my dead from before me, hear me, and intercede for me with Ephron the son of Zohar, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which ***is*** his, which ***is*** at the end of his field; for full silver let him give it to me in your midst as a possession of a grave." And Ephron was sitting among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the ears of the sons of Heth, of all who entered the gate of his city, saying, "No, my lord, hear me: the field I give to you, and the cave that ***is*** in it, to you I give it; before the eyes of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead." And Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. And he spoke to Ephron in the ears of the people of the land, saying, "Only if you, if only you would hear me! I give the silver of the field; take ***it*** from me, and let me bury my dead there." And Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, "My lord, hear me: a land of approximately 10 pounds (four hundred shekels) of silver, between me and you, what ***is*** it? And bury your dead." And Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had spoken ***of*** in the ears of the sons of Heth, approximately 10 pounds (four hundred shekels) of silver, passing with the merchant. And the field of Ephron which ***was*** in Machpelah, which ***was*** before Mamre, the field and the cave which ***was*** in it, and every tree that ***was*** in the field, that ***was*** in all its border all around, was confirmed to Abraham as a purchase before the eyes of the sons of Heth, among all who entered the gate of his city. And after this Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah facing Mamre, that ***is*** Hebron, in the land of Canaan. And the field and the cave which ***was*** in it were confirmed to Abraham as a possession of a grave from the sons of Heth.

Chapter 23 Preview

Sarah dies at the age of 127, and Abraham weeps for her. She had left her homeland with him, followed him through famines and foreign courts, waited decades for a child and finally held Isaac in her arms. Now Abraham, the man to whom God promised all of Canaan, has to ask the local people for a place to bury his wife.

Most of the chapter tells how Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah near Hebron from Ephron the Hittite. It reads like a careful business deal, and it is. But it is also an act of faith. The only piece of the Promised Land Abraham ever owned was a grave, and he bought it because he believed God would give the whole land to his descendants.

Chapter 23 Study

23:1-2 *And the life of Sarah was a hundred years and twenty years and seven years, the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died in Kiriath-arba, that **is** Hebron, in the land of Canaan; and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.*

Sarah is the only woman in the Bible whose age at death is recorded. "The life of Sarah was a hundred years and twenty years and seven years," 127 in all. Isaac was born when she was ninety, so he was now about thirty-seven. She had seen her son grow into a man.

She died at Kiriath-arba, "that is, Hebron." Moses gives the old name and then the name his readers knew. Hebron lies in the hill country south of Jerusalem, near the terebinths of Mamre where Abraham had lived for years (13:18).

Abraham "came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." This is the first time Scripture tells us of a man weeping. The father of the faithful cried at his wife's death. Faith does not mean we do not grieve. Jesus Himself wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus (John 11:35). Paul says believers grieve, but not as those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Abraham's tears were real, and so was his hope.

Sarah was not perfect. She laughed in unbelief and dealt harshly with Hagar. Yet the New Testament honors her as a woman of faith who considered God faithful to His promise (Hebrews 11:11), and Peter holds her up as an example for Christian wives (1 Peter 3:6).

23:3-6 *And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and he spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, "I **am** a sojourner and a resident with you. Give me a possession of a grave with you, and let me bury my dead from before me." And the sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, "Hear us, my lord: you **are** a prince of God in our midst. In the choicest of our graves bury your dead; none of us will withhold his grave from you, from burying your dead."*

After his time of grief, Abraham "rose up from before his dead" and went to the sons of Heth. These were the Hittites, the people who lived around Hebron at the time. Scholars are not certain how these Hittites in Canaan were related to the larger Hittite empire to the north, in what is now Turkey.

Abraham described himself as "a sojourner and a resident with you." He had lived in Canaan for over sixty years, and God had promised it all to him, yet he owned none of it. Stephen later pointed out that God gave Abraham "not even a foot's length" as an inheritance in his lifetime (Acts 7:5).

The Hittites answered with great respect: "you are a prince of God in our midst." They had watched Abraham for years and could see God's blessing on him. They offered him the best of their graves at no cost.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:13 (alluded to)

23:7-9 *And Abraham rose and bowed down to the people of the land, to the sons of Heth. And he spoke with them, saying, "If it is your desire to bury my dead from before me, hear me, and intercede for me with Ephron the son of Zohar, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which* ***is*** *his, which* ***is*** *at the end of his field; for full silver let him give it to me in your midst as a possession of a grave."*

Abraham "bowed down before the people of the land." He was a wealthy and respected man, but he was polite and humble. Believers should be people of courtesy, even in business, and even with those who do not share our faith.

He politely declined a borrowed grave. He did not want to bury Sarah in someone else's tomb. He wanted a place of his own. He asked them to speak to Ephron the son of Zohar, who owned "the cave of Machpelah" at the end of his field.

Abraham asked to buy it "for full silver," that is, the full price. He would not take it as a gift. A gift could be taken back later, or Ephron's family could claim it. A purchase, made in front of witnesses, would make the land Abraham's beyond any question.

23:10-13 *And Ephron was sitting among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the ears of the sons of Heth, of all who entered the gate of his city, saying, "No, my lord, hear me: the field I give to you, and the cave that* ***is*** *in it, to you I give it; before the eyes of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead." And Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. And he spoke to Ephron in the ears of the people of the land, saying, "Only if you, if only you would hear me! I give the silver of the field; take* ***it*** *from me, and let me bury my dead there."*

Ephron was sitting right there among his people. The deal was made "in the ears of the sons of Heth, of all who entered the gate of his city." As we saw at Sodom (19:1), the city gate was where business was done and legal matters were settled. Everyone present was a witness.

Ephron offered to give the field and the cave. Many commentators note that in the ancient Near East a generous-sounding offer could be a polite way to open the bargaining while saving face. It may have been sincere, or it may have been the first move in setting the price. Abraham, wise in the ways of the land, answered courteously but firmly: "I give the silver of the field; take it from me."

Abraham bowed again. He kept his humility even while he kept to his purpose.

23:14-16 *And Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, "My lord, hear me: a land of approximately 10 pounds (four hundred shekels) of silver, between me and you, what* ***is*** *it? And bury your dead." And Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had spoken* ***of*** *in the ears of the sons of Heth, approximately 10 pounds (four hundred shekels) of silver, passing with the merchant.*

Ephron named his price while acting as if it were nothing: "a land of approximately 10 pounds (four hundred shekels) of silver, between me and you, what is it?" A shekel was a weight, about two-fifths of an ounce. We don't know how large the field was, so we can't be sure, but most commentators think Ephron asked a lot. Later in Scripture, Jeremiah bought a field for seventeen

shekels (Jeremiah 32:9), and David bought the threshing floor that became the temple site for fifty shekels (2 Samuel 24:24; 1 Chronicles 21:25 gives a larger price for the whole site), though times and places differed.

Abraham did not haggle. He "weighed out for Ephron the silver," the full amount, "passing with the merchant," meaning silver in the weight accepted by traders, so no one could say he had been cheated. Abraham was not interested in a bargain. He wanted a clear title to the land.

There is a lesson here for us. A believer's word and business dealings should be honest and above reproach. Abraham paid what was asked, in front of witnesses, and left no room for a dispute.

23:17-20 *And the field of Ephron which **was** in Machpelah, which **was** before Mamre, the field and the cave which **was** in it, and every tree that **was** in the field, that **was** in all its border all around, was confirmed to Abraham as a purchase before the eyes of the sons of Heth, among all who entered the gate of his city. And after this Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah facing Mamre, that **is** Hebron, in the land of Canaan. And the field and the cave which **was** in it were confirmed to Abraham as a possession of a grave from the sons of Heth.*

Moses spells out the details like a legal deed: the field, the cave, "every tree that was in the field, that was in all its border all around." All of it "was confirmed to Abraham as a purchase." In a land promised to him by God, Abraham now legally owned one field and one cave.

There he buried Sarah. Later Abraham himself was buried there, and so were Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah (25:9; 49:29-31; 50:13). When Jacob was dying in Egypt, he insisted on being carried back to this cave. The family tomb at Machpelah tied them to the land of promise. A building that many believe stands over the cave can still be seen in Hebron today.

Why did this matter so much? Burying Sarah in Canaan instead of taking her back to Mesopotamia was a statement of faith. Abraham was saying that this land was their home, because God had promised it. Hebrews 11:13 says the patriarchs (the founding fathers of Israel: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) "died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them from afar." That small field was a down payment on everything God had sworn. I believe God's promise of the land to Abraham's descendants still stands (15:18). And for believers, the grave is not the end of the story. God has prepared a city for those who trust Him (Hebrews 11:16).

Chapter 23 Summary

Sarah died at 127 in Hebron, and Abraham mourned and wept for her. Though God had promised him the land, Abraham owned none of it, so he asked the Hittites for a burial site. They honored him as a mighty prince and offered their best graves, but Abraham insisted on buying the cave of Machpelah from Ephron at full price. In front of witnesses at the city gate, he weighed out four hundred shekels of silver, and the field and the cave were deeded to him. There he buried Sarah. The only part of the Promised Land Abraham ever owned was a grave, and he bought it in faith that God would give the whole land to his descendants.

People and Places

- Kiriath-arba (Hebron): a city in the hill country south of Jerusalem, near Mamre.
- Sons of Heth: the Hittites who lived around Hebron in Abraham's day.
- Ephron the Hittite: the owner of the field and cave Abraham bought.
- Machpelah: the cave near Hebron that became the family tomb of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Chapter 23 Study Questions

1. How old was Sarah when she died, and where did she die? (23:1-2)

2. How did Abraham respond to Sarah's death? (23:2)

3. How did Abraham describe himself to the sons of Heth? (23:4)

4. The Hittites called Abraham "a prince of God in our midst" (23:6). What had they seen in him over the years, and what do our neighbors see in us?

5. Why do you think Abraham insisted on paying the full price instead of accepting the land as a gift? (23:9, 13)

6. Where was the deal made, and why did that matter? (23:10, 18)

7. Abraham paid the full price, weighed out in front of witnesses (23:15-16). What does his example teach about honesty in money and business?

8. Who else was later buried in the cave of Machpelah? (25:9; 49:29-31)

9. Abraham grieved, but with hope. How does faith in God's promises shape the way a believer faces the death of someone they love?

10. Abraham lived as "a sojourner and a resident." In what ways should believers today live as people who are passing through this world?

Chapter 24: A Bride for Isaac

Scripture

24:1-9 And Abraham was old, advanced in days; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in everything. And Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please put your hand under my thigh, that I may make you swear by the LORD, the God of the heavens and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am dwelling; but you will go to my land and to my kindred, and you will take a wife for my son, for Isaac." And the servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman will not be willing to go after me to this land. Shall I indeed take your son back to the land from which you came out?" And Abraham said to him, "Guard yourself, lest you take my son back there. The LORD, the God of the heavens, who took me from the house of my father and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying, 'To your seed I will give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. And if the woman is not willing to go after you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you shall not take my son back there." And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and he swore to him concerning this matter.

24:10-27 And the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master and went, and every good thing of his master ***was*** in his hand; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. And he made the camels kneel outside the city by the well of water, at the time of evening, at the time when the women who draw water go out. And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please make ***it*** happen before me this day, and do steadfast love with my master Abraham. Look, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. And it will be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please lower your jar, that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink,' her You have appointed for Your servant, for Isaac; and by it I will know that You have done steadfast love with my master." And it happened, before he had finished speaking, and look, Rebekah was coming out, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, the brother of Abraham; and her jar ***was*** on her shoulder. And the young woman ***was*** very good of appearance, a virgin, and no man had known her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. And the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water to sip from your jar." And she said, "Drink, my lord." And she hurried and let her jar down on her hand and gave him a drink. And she finished giving him a drink, and she said, "I will also draw for your camels, until they have finished drinking." And she hurried and emptied her jar into the trough, and she ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. And the man was gazing at her, keeping silent, to know whether the LORD had made his way successful or not. And it happened, when the camels had finished drinking, and the man took a ring of gold, its weight approximately 1/5 ounce (a beka), and two bracelets on her hands, their weight approximately 4 ounces (ten ***shekels***) of gold. And he said, "Whose daughter ***are*** you? Please tell me. Is there room ***in*** the house of your father for us to lodge?" And she said to him, "I ***am*** the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." And she said to him, "Both straw and fodder ***are*** plentiful with us, and also room to lodge." And the man bowed low and bowed down to the LORD. And he said, "Blessed ***be*** the LORD,

the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His steadfast love and His faithfulness from my master. As for me, on the way the LORD has led me ***to*** the house of the brothers of my master."

24:28-61 And the young woman ran and told the house of her mother according to these things. And Rebekah had a brother, and his name ***was*** Laban; and Laban ran to the man outside, to the spring. And it happened, when he saw the ring and the bracelets on the hands of his sister, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, "Thus the man spoke to me," and he came to the man; and look, he ***was*** standing by the camels at the spring. And he said, "Come in, blessed of the LORD! Why do you stand outside? And I, I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels." And the man came into the house, and he unloaded the camels; and he gave straw and fodder to the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who ***were*** with him. And ***food*** was set before him to eat, and he said, "I will not eat until I have spoken my words." And he said, "Speak." And he said, "I ***am*** the servant of Abraham. And the LORD has blessed my master exceedingly, and he has become great; and He has given him sheep and cattle, and silver and gold, and ***male*** servants and female servants, and camels and donkeys. And Sarah the wife of my master bore a son to my master after her old age, and he has given him all that he has. And my master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I am dwelling; but you shall go to the house of my father and to my family, and you shall take a wife for my son.' And I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not go after me.' And he said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send His angel with you and will make your way successful; and you will take a wife for my son from my family and from the house of my father. Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my family; and if they do not give ***her*** to you, then you will be clear of my oath.' And I came this day to the spring, and I said, 'O LORD, God of my master Abraham, if You are, please, making successful my way on which I am going, look, I am standing by the spring of water; and it will be that the maiden who comes out to draw, and I say to her, "Please give me a little water to drink from your jar," and she says to me, "Both you drink, and I will also draw for your camels," she ***is*** the woman whom the LORD has appointed for the son of my master.' I, before I had finished speaking to my heart, and look, Rebekah was coming out, and her jar ***was*** on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring and drew, and I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.' And she hurried and let her jar down from upon her, and she said, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink.' And I drank, and she also gave the camels a drink. And I asked her and said, 'Whose daughter ***are*** you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.' And I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her hands. And I bowed low and bowed down to the LORD, and I blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the way of truth to take the daughter of the brother of my master for his son. And now, if you are doing steadfast love and faithfulness with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right or to the left." And Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The matter has come out from the LORD; we are not able to speak to you bad or good. Look, Rebekah ***is*** before you; take ***her*** and go, and let her be a wife for the son of your master, just as the LORD has spoken." And it happened, when the servant of Abraham heard their words, and he bowed down to the ground to the LORD. And the servant brought out articles of silver and articles of gold and garments, and he gave ***them*** to Rebekah; and he gave precious gifts to her brother and to her mother. And they ate and drank, he and the men who ***were*** with him, and they lodged; and they arose in the morning, and he said, "Send me away

to my master." And her brother and her mother said, "Let the young woman stay with us ***some*** days, or ten; after ***that*** she will go." And he said to them, "Do not delay me, and the LORD has made my way successful; send me away, and let me go to my master." And they said, "Let us call the young woman and ask her mouth." And they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go." And they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and the servant of Abraham and his men. And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "Our sister, you, become thousands of ten thousands; and may your seed possess the gate of those who hate him." And Rebekah arose, and her young women, and they rode on the camels and went after the man; and the servant took Rebekah and went.

24:62-67 And Isaac had come from going ***to*** Beer-lahai-roi, and he was dwelling in the land of the Negeb. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the turning of evening; and he lifted up his eyes and saw, and look, camels ***were*** coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes and saw Isaac, and she got down from upon the camel. And she said to the servant, "Who ***is*** this man who is walking in the field to meet us?" And the servant said, "He ***is*** my master." And she took the veil and covered herself. And the servant recounted to Isaac all the things that he had done. And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother.

Chapter 24 Preview

Genesis 24 is the longest chapter in the book, and it is a love story guided by the hand of God. Abraham is old, Sarah has died, and Isaac is still unmarried. Abraham sends his trusted servant back to his relatives in Mesopotamia to find a wife for his son, with strict orders: she must not be a Canaanite, and Isaac must not go back there.

The servant prays a specific prayer at a well, and before he even finishes, Rebekah walks out and does exactly what he asked God for. He tells the whole story to her family, they agree that "The matter has come out from the LORD," and Rebekah says three simple words: "I will go." The chapter ends at evening in a field in the Negeb, where Isaac meets his bride, takes her as his wife and loves her. Through it all, God is quietly guiding every step.

Chapter 24 Study

24:1-4 *And Abraham was old, advanced in days; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in everything. And Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please put your hand under my thigh, that I may make you swear by the LORD, the God of the heavens and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am dwelling; but you will go to my land and to my kindred, and you will take a wife for my son, for Isaac."*

"Abraham was old, advanced in days." He was about 140, and Isaac was about forty (25:20). Moses adds that "the LORD had blessed Abraham in everything." After all the waiting, the testing and the grief, God had been faithful at every turn.

One thing remained: a wife for Isaac. In that culture, parents arranged their children's marriages. Abraham called his oldest servant, the one in charge of everything he owned. He isn't named here. Many think he was Eliezer of Damascus, whom Abraham once expected to be his heir (15:2), but we cannot be sure.

"Please put your hand under my thigh" was a solemn way of swearing an oath in that time. It seems to have been connected with a man's descendants, which fits an oath about the future of Abraham's family. Jacob asked Joseph to swear the same way (47:29).

The servant had to swear "by the LORD, the God of the heavens and the God of the earth." Isaac must not marry a Canaanite. The Canaanites worshiped false gods, and their ways were deeply corrupt (15:16). Abraham wanted a wife for his son who would share the family's faith. Believers today face the same question. Paul tells Christians not to be bound together with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). Marriage is one of the most important decisions a person can make, and faith in God should be at the center of it.

24:5-9 *And the servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman will not be willing to go after me to this land. Shall I indeed take your son back to the land from which you came out?" And Abraham said to him, "Guard yourself, lest you take my son back there. The LORD, the God of the heavens, who took me from the house of my father and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying, 'To your seed I will give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. And if the woman is not willing to go after you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you shall not take my son back there." And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and he swore to him concerning this matter.*

The servant raised a fair question. What if the woman would not come? Should he take Isaac back to Mesopotamia?

Abraham's answer was firm: "Guard yourself, lest you take my son back there." God had called Abraham out of that land and promised him this one. Isaac belonged in Canaan, the land of promise. To go back would be to turn away from God's call.

Abraham's confidence rested on God's promise: "To your seed I will give this land." He was sure that God "will send His angel before you." Abraham did not know who the bride would be, but he knew the God who would lead the way.

Still, Abraham did not force anything. If the woman was not willing, the servant would be free from his oath. God guides, but He does not drag anyone into His plan against their will. The servant put his hand under Abraham's thigh and swore.

24:10-14 *And the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master and went, and every good thing of his master **was** in his hand; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. And he made the camels kneel outside the city by the well of water, at the time of evening, at the time when the women who draw water go out. And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please make **it** happen before me this day, and do steadfast love with my master Abraham. Look, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. And it will be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please lower your jar, that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink,' her You have appointed for Your servant, for Isaac; and by it I will know that You have done steadfast love with my master."*

The servant set out with ten camels loaded with gifts and traveled to Mesopotamia, to "the city of Nahor." Mesopotamia means between the rivers, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates. The city of Nahor was either Haran itself or a town near it, where Abraham's brother had settled. The journey was hundreds of miles and would have taken weeks.

He arrived at evening, "the time when the women who draw water go out." He made his camels kneel by the well and then he prayed. The servant had learned from his master to bring everything to God.

His prayer was simple and specific. He asked God to "please make it happen before me this day." Then he asked for a sign. He would ask a girl for a drink. If she offered to water his camels also, that would be the one God had chosen. Rather than asking for magic, he was asking for a woman who showed kindness, hard work and generosity to a stranger. Those are the very qualities a godly wife would need.

Should we ask God for signs like this? The servant was on a special mission in a time before Scripture was written down. Today God guides us mainly through His Word, prayer, wise counsel and His Spirit. But we can, and should, pray specifically about the details of our lives.

24:15-21 *And it happened, before he had finished speaking, and look, Rebekah was coming out, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, the brother of Abraham; and her jar **was** on her shoulder. And the young woman **was** very good of appearance, a virgin, and no man had known her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. And the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water to sip from your jar." And she said, "Drink, my lord." And she hurried and let her jar down on her hand and gave him a drink. And she finished giving him a drink, and she said, "I will also draw for your camels, until they have finished drinking." And she hurried and emptied her jar into the trough, and she ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. And the man was gazing at her, keeping silent, to know whether the LORD had made his way successful or not.*

"Before he had finished speaking," Rebekah appeared. God was answering the prayer while it was still being prayed (Isaiah 65:24). Moses tells us right away who she was: the granddaughter of Abraham's brother Nahor. She was from the very family Abraham had named.

She was "very good of appearance, a virgin." She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up. The servant ran to her and asked for a drink. "Drink, my lord," she said, and gave it quickly. Then she offered, "I will also draw for your camels, until they have finished drinking."

That was no small offer. A thirsty camel can drink many gallons of water, and there were ten of them. She ran back and forth to the well again and again until they were all done. Rebekah did far more than she was asked, and she did it cheerfully.

Meanwhile the servant "was gazing at her, keeping silent." He was watching to see whether the LORD had made his journey successful. It is good to pray, and it is also good to wait quietly and watch for how God answers.

24:22-27 *And it happened, when the camels had finished drinking, and the man took a ring of gold, its weight approximately 1/5 ounce (a beka), and two bracelets on her hands, their weight approximately 4 ounces (ten **shekels**) of gold. And he said, "Whose daughter **are** you? Please tell me. Is there room **in** the house of your father for us to lodge?" And she said to him, "I **am** the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." And she said to him, "Both straw and fodder **are** plentiful with us, and also room to lodge." And the man bowed low and bowed down to the LORD. And he said, "Blessed **be** the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His steadfast love and His faithfulness from my master. As for me, on the way the LORD has led me **to** the house of the brothers of my master."*

When the camels finished drinking, the servant gave Rebekah a gold ring and two gold bracelets. Then he asked who her father was and whether there was room to stay. Her answer told him everything: "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." She was Abraham's own family. And yes, there was plenty of room and plenty of feed.

The servant's first response was worship. He "bowed low and bowed down to the LORD." Before he said another word to Rebekah, he gave thanks to God.

His words are beautiful: "as for me, on the way the LORD has led me." He had set out on a long road, not knowing where it would end. He kept walking and kept praying, and God led him straight to the right house. Many believers can say the same thing when they look back: we didn't see the path ahead, but the LORD guided us in the way. God usually guides people who are already moving in obedience.

24:28-33 *And the young woman ran and told the house of her mother according to these things. And Rebekah had a brother, and his name **was** Laban; and Laban ran to the man outside, to the spring. And it happened, when he saw the ring and the bracelets on the hands of his sister, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, "Thus the man spoke to me," and he came to the man; and look, he **was** standing by the camels at the spring. And he said, "Come in, blessed of the LORD! Why do you stand outside? And I, I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels." And the man came into the house, and he unloaded the camels; and he gave straw and fodder to the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who **were** with him. And **food** was set before him to eat, and he said, "I will not eat until I have spoken my words." And he said, "Speak."*

Rebekah ran home and told her mother's household. Then we meet her brother Laban. He "ran to the man outside, to the spring." Moses gives us a clue to why. Laban saw "the ring and the bracelets on the hands of his sister." Laban's eye was on the gold. We will see much more of Laban in chapters 29 to 31, and money will always be on his mind.

Still, Laban welcomed the servant warmly: "Come in, blessed of the LORD!" He unloaded the camels, gave them straw and feed and brought water to wash the men's feet. Hospitality was a sacred duty in that culture.

But when food was set in front of him, the servant refused to eat: "I will not eat until I have spoken my words." His master's errand came before his own comfort. A faithful servant keeps the main thing the main thing.

24:34-41 *And he said, "I **am** the servant of Abraham. And the LORD has blessed my master exceedingly, and he has become great; and He has given him sheep and cattle, and silver and gold, and **male** servants and female servants, and camels and donkeys. And Sarah the wife of my master bore a son to my master after her old age, and he has given him all that he has. And my master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I am dwelling; but you shall go to the house of my father and to my family, and you shall take a wife for my son.' And I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not go after me.' And he said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send His angel with you and will make your way successful; and you will take a wife for my son from my family and from the house of my father. Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my family; and if they do not give **her** to you, then you will be clear of my oath.'*

The servant's speech is a long retelling of what we have already read. Moses includes it in full because it shows how the servant saw everything through the lens of God's hand at work.

He began with who he was: "I am the servant of Abraham." He did not even give his own name. His whole identity was wrapped up in his master. Then he told them how the LORD had greatly blessed Abraham, and that Sarah had borne a son in her old age, and that Abraham "has given him all that he has." Isaac was the heir of everything.

Many see in this chapter a picture of the Father sending His Spirit into the world to call out a bride for His Son. Like the servant, the Holy Spirit does not speak about Himself. He points to the

Son (John 16:13-14). And all that the Father has belongs to the Son (John 16:15). The New Testament does not directly make this comparison, so we should hold it lightly, but it is a lovely picture of how the gospel calls people to Christ.

Then he explained the oath: no wife from the Canaanites, but a wife from Abraham's relatives, and freedom from the oath if the family refused.

24:42-49 *And I came this day to the spring, and I said, 'O LORD, God of my master Abraham, if You are, please, making successful my way on which I am going, look, I am standing by the spring of water; and it will be that the maiden who comes out to draw, and I say to her, "Please give me a little water to drink from your jar," and she says to me, "Both you drink, and I will also draw for your camels," she **is** the woman whom the LORD has appointed for the son of my master.' I, before I had finished speaking to my heart, and look, Rebekah was coming out, and her jar **was** on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring and drew, and I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.' And she hurried and let her jar down from upon her, and she said, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink.' And I drank, and she also gave the camels a drink. And I asked her and said, 'Whose daughter **are** you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.' And I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her hands. And I bowed low and bowed down to the LORD, and I blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the way of truth to take the daughter of the brother of my master for his son. And now, if you are doing steadfast love and faithfulness with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right or to the left."*

The servant told of his prayer at the spring and how Rebekah came out "before I had finished speaking to my heart." He had prayed silently, and God heard. Nobody at the spring knew what he had asked. Only God did. Rebekah's offer to water the camels could not have been staged.

He told how he put "the ring on her nose" and the bracelets on her wrists. A nose ring was a common piece of jewelry for women in that region. Then he worshiped the LORD, "who had led me in the way of truth."

Finally, he put the question to the family. Would they show "steadfast love and faithfulness" to his master? He wanted a clear answer so that he would know which way to turn. He did not pressure them. He laid out the facts of God's leading and let them decide.

24:50-53 *And Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The matter has come out from the LORD; we are not able to speak to you bad or good. Look, Rebekah **is** before you; take **her** and go, and let her be a wife for the son of your master, just as the LORD has spoken." And it happened, when the servant of Abraham heard their words, and he bowed down to the ground to the LORD. And the servant brought out articles of silver and articles of gold and garments, and he gave **them** to Rebekah; and he gave precious gifts to her brother and to her mother.*

Laban and Bethuel gave their answer: "The matter has come out from the LORD; we are not able to speak to you bad or good." Even this family, which seems to have mixed the worship of the LORD with other gods (31:19, 30), could see that God was in it. When God's hand is this clear, there is nothing left to argue about.

"Take her and go." The servant's first response, once again, was to bow "to the ground to the LORD." Every step of this journey was marked by prayer before and praise after.

Then the servant brought out gifts of silver, gold and clothing for Rebekah, and precious things for her brother and her mother. These gifts were part of the custom of marriage in that culture, a bride price given to the family and gifts given to the bride.

24:54-58 *And they ate and drank, he and the men who **were** with him, and they lodged; and they arose in the morning, and he said, "Send me away to my master." And her brother and her mother said, "Let the young woman stay with us **some** days, or ten; after **that** she will go." And he said to them, "Do not delay me, and the LORD has made my way successful; send me away, and let me go to my master." And they said, "Let us call the young woman and ask her mouth." And they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go."*

After a night of feasting, the servant was ready to leave. "Send me away to my master." The family wanted more time: "Let the young woman stay with us some days, or ten." That was a natural request. They were about to lose a daughter and sister, likely never to see her again.

The servant would not delay. "Do not delay me, and the LORD has made my way successful; send me away." When God has made His will clear, it is wise to act on it.

So the family asked Rebekah herself: "Will you go with this man?" Her answer was brave and simple: "I will go." She would leave her home, her family and her country, to travel hundreds of miles to marry a man she had never seen. She did it because she believed the LORD was in it. In that, she walked the same road of faith as Abraham, who also left his country and his father's house at God's call (12:1).

24:59-61 *And they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and the servant of Abraham and his men. And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "Our sister, you, become thousands of ten thousands; and may your seed possess the gate of those who hate him." And Rebekah arose, and her young women, and they rode on the camels and went after the man; and the servant took Rebekah and went.*

They sent Rebekah away with her nurse and her maids. Her nurse, Deborah, will be mentioned again many years later when she dies (35:8).

The family blessed Rebekah: "become thousands of ten thousands." They prayed that her descendants would "possess the gate of those who hate him." These words echo what God had just promised Abraham on Mount Moriah, that his seed would possess the gate of their enemies (22:17). Without knowing it, Rebekah's family was praying in line with God's own covenant promise.

Rebekah mounted a camel and followed the man. The servant had come with ten camels and a promise, and he left with the bride.

24:62-67 *And Isaac had come from going **to** Beer-lahai-roi, and he was dwelling in the land of the Negeb. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the turning of evening; and he lifted up his eyes and saw, and look, camels **were** coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes and saw Isaac, and she got down from upon the camel. And she said to the servant, "Who **is** this man who is walking in the field to meet us?" And the servant said, "He **is** my master." And she took the veil and covered herself. And the servant recounted to Isaac all the things that he had done. And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother.*

The last scene moves back to Canaan. Isaac was living in the Negeb, the dry southern region. He had come from Beer-lahai-roi, the well where the angel of the LORD had met Hagar (16:13-14).

"Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the turning of evening." He was alone, perhaps praying, perhaps grieving his mother. He looked up and saw the camels coming.

Rebekah looked up too. When she learned that the man walking toward them was Isaac, she got down from her camel and "took the veil and covered herself." It was a sign of modesty and respect, and of a bride meeting her groom.

The servant told Isaac everything that had happened. Then Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent and "took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her." Their marriage was arranged, but it was filled with love. And he "was comforted after his mother." God had provided a ram on Moriah. Now He provided a wife and comfort in grief. The God of Abraham is a God who cares about the details of our lives.

Chapter 24 Summary

Abraham, old and blessed by God, sent his oldest servant to his relatives in Mesopotamia to find a wife for Isaac, making him swear not to take a Canaanite wife and not to take Isaac back there. At the well outside the city of Nahor, the servant prayed for a sign, and before he finished, Rebekah came, gave him a drink and watered all his camels. She turned out to be Abraham's great-niece. The servant worshiped the LORD and told the whole story to her family. Laban and Bethuel agreed that the matter came from the LORD, and Rebekah chose to go. When she arrived in Canaan, Isaac met her in the field at evening, took her as his wife and loved her, and he was comforted after his mother's death.

People and Places

- Mesopotamia: the land between the Tigris and Euphrates.
- City of Nahor: the town in Mesopotamia where Abraham's brother Nahor lived, at or near Haran.
- Laban: Rebekah's brother, later Jacob's father-in-law.

Chapter 24 Study Questions

1. Why did Abraham not want Isaac to marry a Canaanite? (24:3)

2. Why did Abraham insist that Isaac not go back to Mesopotamia? (24:6-7)

3. What did the servant ask God for at the well? (24:12-14)

4. How did Rebekah go beyond what was asked of her? (24:18-20)

5. The servant worshiped before he said another word to Rebekah (24:26-27). What would it look like to make thanks your first response when God answers?

6. What clue does Moses give about Laban's character? (24:29-30)

7. What did Laban and Bethuel conclude about the matter? (24:50-51)

8. Rebekah said, "I will go" (24:58). What did she give up, and how was her step like Abraham's in 12:1?

9. The servant said, "on the way the LORD has led me." How have you seen God guide you as you stepped out in obedience? (24:27)

10. What does this chapter teach about how believers should approach marriage, whether choosing a spouse or praying for their children?

Chapter 25: Jacob and Esau

Scripture

25:1-11 And Abraham again took a wife, and her name ***was*** Keturah. And she bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah. And Jokshan fathered Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim and Letushim and Leummim. And the sons of Midian ***were*** Ephah and Epher and Hanoch and Abida and Eldaah. All these ***were*** the sons of Keturah. And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. And to the sons of the concubines whom Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts; and he sent them away from Isaac his son while he ***was*** still alive, eastward, to the land of the east. And these ***are*** the days of the years of the life of Abraham which he lived: a hundred years and seventy years and five years. And Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, old and satisfied, and he was gathered to his people. And Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which ***is*** facing Mamre, the field which Abraham bought from the sons of Heth. There Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife. And it happened after the death of Abraham, and God blessed Isaac his son; and Isaac dwelt near Beer-lahai-roi.

25:12-18 And these ***are*** the generations of Ishmael the son of Abraham, whom Hagar the Egyptian, the female servant of Sarah, bore to Abraham. And these ***are*** the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebaioth; and Kedar and Adbeel and Mibsam, and Mishma and Dumah and Massa, Hadad and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These, they ***are*** the sons of Ishmael, and these ***are*** their names, by their villages and by their encampments: twelve princes according to their tribes. And these ***are*** the years of the life of Ishmael: a hundred years and thirty years and seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and he was gathered to his people. And they dwelt from Havilah to Shur, which ***is*** facing Egypt as you go toward Assyria. In the face of all his brothers he fell.

25:19-34 And these ***are*** the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham: Abraham fathered Isaac. And Isaac was a son of forty years when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, for himself as a wife. And Isaac entreated the LORD for his wife, for she ***was*** barren; and the LORD was entreated by him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her, and she said, "If ***it is*** so, why ***am*** I this ***way***?" And she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her, "Two nations ***are*** in your womb, and two peoples from your inner parts will be separated; and ***one*** people will be stronger than ***the other*** people, and the elder will serve the younger." And her days to give birth were fulfilled, and look, twins ***were*** in her womb. And the first came out red, all of him like a cloak of hair; and they called his name Esau. And after that his brother came out, and his hand ***was*** grasping the heel of Esau; and he called his name Jacob. And Isaac ***was*** a son of sixty years when she bore them. And the lads grew, and Esau was a man knowing hunting, a man of the field; and Jacob ***was*** a blameless man, dwelling ***in*** tents. And Isaac loved Esau, for game ***was*** in his mouth; and Rebekah was loving Jacob. And Jacob cooked stew, and Esau came from the field, and he ***was*** exhausted. And Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me gulp some of the red, this red ***stew***, for I ***am*** exhausted." Therefore ***one*** called his name Edom. And Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day." And Esau said, "Look, I am going to die; and what ***is*** this to me, a birthright?" And Jacob

said, "Swear to me as of this day." And he swore to him, and he sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; and he ate and drank, and he arose and went. And Esau despised the birthright.

Chapter 25 Preview

Chapter 25 closes the story of Abraham and opens the story of his grandsons. We read of Abraham's other sons by Keturah, how he gave everything to Isaac and how he died "old and satisfied" and was buried by Isaac and Ishmael in the cave of Machpelah. Then Moses gives a short record of Ishmael's twelve sons, just as God had promised.

The second half turns to Isaac and Rebekah. After twenty years without children, Isaac prays, and Rebekah conceives twins who struggle inside her. God tells her that two nations are in her womb and that the older will serve the younger. Esau is born first, red and hairy, with Jacob holding his heel. The chapter ends with a bowl of stew and a terrible trade: Esau sells his birthright to Jacob, and Scripture says plainly that Esau "despised the birthright."

Chapter 25 Study

25:1-4 *And Abraham again took a wife, and her name **was** Keturah. And she bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah. And Jokshan fathered Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim and Letushim and Leummim. And the sons of Midian **were** Ephah and Epher and Hanoch and Abida and Eldaah. All these **were** the sons of Keturah.*

"Abraham again took a wife, and her name was Keturah." We aren't told exactly when this happened. It is listed after Sarah's death, but 1 Chronicles 1:32 calls Keturah Abraham's concubine, and verse 6 here speaks of "the concubines whom Abraham had." So some think the marriage took place earlier, while Sarah was alive. A concubine was a secondary wife (see 16:1-2).

Keturah bore six sons. The best known is Midian, the father of the Midianites. Moses himself would later flee to Midian and marry the daughter of a Midianite priest (Exodus 2:15-21). Sheba and Dedan became Arabian peoples known for trade. God had promised that Abraham would be the father of many nations (17:4-5), and here we see that promise taking shape.

25:5-6 *And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. And to the sons of the concubines whom Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts; and he sent them away from Isaac his son while he **was** still alive, eastward, to the land of the east.*

"Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac." Isaac was the son of promise and the chief heir. The other sons received gifts while Abraham was still living, and he sent them "to the land of the east," away from Isaac.

This was wise. Abraham made his wishes clear before he died and settled matters so there would be less room for fighting among his sons after he was gone. It also kept the line of promise separate in the land God had given to Isaac. Parents today would do well to plan ahead with the same care, so their families are not torn apart over an inheritance.

25:7-11 *And these **are** the days of the years of the life of Abraham which he lived: a hundred years and seventy years and five years. And Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, old and satisfied, and he was gathered to his people. And Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which **is** facing Mamre, the field which Abraham bought from the sons of Heth. There Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife. And it happened after the death of Abraham, and God blessed Isaac his son; and Isaac dwelt near Beer-lahai-roi.*

"The days of the years of the life of Abraham" were 175 years. He had come into Canaan at seventy-five (12:4), so he lived exactly one hundred years in the land of promise as a sojourner.

"Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, old and satisfied." That is a beautiful epitaph. Abraham had made mistakes, but he had walked with God, and his life was full.

"He was gathered to his people." This phrase is different from being buried, which comes in the next verse. It hints that Abraham went to join those who had died before him. Jesus said that God is "the God of Abraham," and that He is the God of the living, not the dead (Matthew 22:32). Abraham is alive with God now.

Isaac and Ishmael buried their father together in the cave of Machpelah, beside Sarah. The two half brothers, once separated, stood side by side at their father's grave. Death often brings families back together, at least for a moment.

"God blessed Isaac his son." The blessing passed to the next generation. Isaac settled by Beer-lahai-roi, the well where God had once seen Hagar in her distress (16:14).

25:12-18 *And these **are** the generations of Ishmael the son of Abraham, whom Hagar the Egyptian, the female servant of Sarah, bore to Abraham. And these **are** the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebaioth; and Kedar and Adbeel and Mibsam, and Mishma and Dumah and Massa, Hadad and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These, they **are** the sons of Ishmael, and these **are** their names, by their villages and by their encampments: twelve princes according to their tribes. And these **are** the years of the life of Ishmael: a hundred years and thirty years and seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and he was gathered to his people. And they dwelt from Havilah to Shur, which **is** facing Egypt as you go toward Assyria. In the face of all his brothers he fell.*

Moses now gives "the generations of Ishmael the son of Abraham." God had promised that Ishmael would father twelve princes and become a great nation (17:20). Here are the twelve, "twelve princes according to their tribes." Two of the names, Nebaioth and Kedar, appear later in Scripture as Arabian peoples (Isaiah 60:7). Every promise God made about Ishmael came true.

Ishmael lived 137 years and "was gathered to his people." His descendants spread from Havilah to Shur, in the desert lands east of Egypt and across northern Arabia.

"In the face of all his brothers he fell." The Hebrew can be read to mean that he lived in hostility toward his relatives, or that he settled to the east of, or alongside, them. Either way, it recalls what

the angel told Hagar before Ishmael was born, that he would live in hostility toward his brothers (16:12). After this, Moses sets Ishmael aside, and the story follows Isaac.

25:19-21 *And these **are** the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham: Abraham fathered Isaac. And Isaac was a son of forty years when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, for himself as a wife. And Isaac entreated the LORD for his wife, for she **was** barren; and the LORD was entreated by him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.*

"And these are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham." A new section of Genesis begins. Isaac married Rebekah at forty. She was from Paddan-aram, which means the plain of Aram, the region around Haran. Her family were Arameans, the people of that land.

Like Sarah before her, Rebekah "was barren," unable to have children. The family of promise once again depended on a miracle. God wanted it to be clear that this line was His doing, not theirs.

Isaac did the right thing. He "entreated the LORD for his wife." He did not take a second wife, as his father had done with Hagar. He prayed. And "the LORD was entreated by him." The twins were born when Isaac was sixty (25:26), so Isaac and Rebekah waited and prayed for about twenty years. Like Isaac's own birth, this answer was part of God's unique plan for the promised line, not a promise that every couple who prays will conceive (see 11:30).

New Testament links: Romans 9:10 (alluded to)

25:22-23 *And the children struggled together within her, and she said, "If **it is** so, why **am** I this **way**?" And she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her, "Two nations **are** in your womb, and two peoples from your inner parts will be separated; and **one** people will be stronger than **the other** people, and the elder will serve the younger."*

"The children struggled together within her." The pregnancy was so hard that Rebekah asked, "If it is so, why am I this way?" She "went to inquire of the LORD." That is the right response to confusion. Take it to God.

God answered with a prophecy: "Two nations are in your womb." Her two sons would become two peoples, Israel from Jacob and Edom from Esau. Their struggle in the womb was a picture of a struggle that would last for centuries.

Then God said, "the elder will serve the younger." In that culture the firstborn son normally received the greater honor and the larger share of the inheritance. God turned that custom upside down. Paul uses this verse in Romans 9:10-13 to show that God's choice rests on His own purpose and grace, not on human works or birth order. God made this choice before the twins were born and before either had done anything good or bad. Paul pairs it with Malachi 1:2-3, where God says He loved Jacob and hated Esau. In Scripture, "love" and "hate" can be used to describe choosing one and not the other (compare Luke 14:26), and many read Malachi as speaking mainly of the two nations, while others see individuals in view as well. Bible teachers have long discussed how far this passage reaches. Some read Paul as teaching God's choice of individuals for salvation. Others read him as speaking of God's choice of nations and their roles in history. Good Bible teachers I respect land on both sides, and I am not going to settle that debate in a Genesis study. What is clear is that God is free to show grace as He wills, and that no one can claim to have earned His choice.

New Testament links: Romans 9:12 (quoted)

25:24-26 *And her days to give birth were fulfilled, and look, twins **were** in her womb. And the first came out red, all of him like a cloak of hair; and they called his name Esau. And after that his brother came out, and his hand **was** grasping the heel of Esau; and he called his name Jacob. And Isaac **was** a son of sixty years when she bore them.*

The twins were born, and they could not have been more different. The first came out red and hairy, "all of him like a cloak of hair," so they named him Esau. The Hebrew word for "hairy" sounds like Seir, the land where Esau's descendants would live. The second came out holding his brother's heel, so he was named Jacob. The name is connected with the Hebrew word for "heel," and it came to carry the sense of one who grabs at the heel, or one who trips up and supplants another. Esau himself would later say, "Is it because one called his name Jacob that he has supplanted me these two times?" (27:36).

The prophet Hosea looks back on this scene: "In the womb he took his brother by the heel" (Hosea 12:3). Jacob was grasping from the very start. The whole story of his life is about God taking a grasping man and making him a man of faith.

25:27-28 *And the lads grew, and Esau was a man knowing hunting, a man of the field; and Jacob **was** a blameless man, dwelling **in** tents. And Isaac loved Esau, for game **was** in his mouth; and Rebekah was loving Jacob.*

As the boys grew, their differences grew too. Esau became "a man knowing hunting, a man of the field." He was rugged, active and outdoors. Jacob was "a blameless man, dwelling in tents." The word translated "blameless" can mean complete, settled or whole. It does not mean sinless, as the next verses show. He stayed close to home and the flocks.

Then comes a sad sentence: "Isaac loved Esau, for game was in his mouth; and Rebekah was loving Jacob." Each parent had a favorite. Isaac's love was tied to his appetite. The rest of Genesis shows the pain it caused. It will tear this family apart in chapter 27, and Jacob will repeat the

same mistake with his own sons, favoring Joseph (37:3). Parents, love each of your children fully, and don't play favorites. Children notice, and the wounds last.

25:29-34 *And Jacob cooked stew, and Esau came from the field, and he **was** exhausted. And Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me gulp some of the red, this red **stew**, for I **am** exhausted." Therefore **one** called his name Edom. And Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day." And Esau said, "Look, I am going to die; and what **is** this to me, a birthright?" And Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day." And he swore to him, and he sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; and he ate and drank, and he arose and went. And Esau despised the birthright.*

One day Jacob was cooking stew when Esau came in from the field "exhausted." He said, "Let me gulp some of the red, this red stew." Esau was so hungry he didn't even name the food. From this moment he got a nickname, Edom, which means "red."

Jacob saw his chance. "Sell me your birthright as of this day." The birthright was the special right of the firstborn son. It usually included a double share of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17) and the place of leadership in the family. In this family it meant more. It was tied to God's covenant promises to Abraham, the line through which all nations would be blessed.

Esau shrugged it off: "I am going to die; and what is this to me, a birthright?" He wasn't dying, only hungry. He traded something eternal for something that would be gone in a few minutes. Jacob made him swear to it, and Esau did.

Both brothers were wrong. Jacob was scheming and took advantage of his brother's weakness, instead of trusting God to give what He had promised. But Moses puts the main blame on Esau: "And Esau despised the birthright." To despise something is to treat it as worthless. Hebrews 12:16 calls Esau a "profane person," who "for one meal sold his birthright."

The warning for us is plain. Many people trade what lasts forever for what satisfies for a moment: purity for a moment of pleasure, faithfulness for a bit of comfort, eternal life for this world's goods. Jesus asked what it will profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul (Mark 8:36). Don't sell your birthright for a bowl of stew.

New Testament links: Hebrews 12:16 (alluded to)

Chapter 25 Summary

Abraham had more sons by Keturah, but he gave all he had to Isaac and sent the other sons away with gifts. He died at 175, satisfied with life, and Isaac and Ishmael buried him beside Sarah. Ishmael's twelve sons became twelve princes, as God had promised. Isaac married Rebekah, and after twenty years of barrenness he prayed, and God gave them twins. God told Rebekah that two nations were in her womb and that the older would serve the younger. Esau was born first, red and hairy, and Jacob came out holding his heel. Isaac favored Esau, and Rebekah favored Jacob. One day an exhausted Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew, and in doing so he despised his birthright.

People and Places

- Keturah: Abraham's later wife (or concubine), mother of six sons.
- Midian: one of Keturah's sons, father of the Midianites.
- Paddan-aram: the region of Aram around Haran in Mesopotamia, Rebekah's homeland.
- Esau: Isaac's firstborn twin, also called Edom, father of the Edomites.
- Jacob: Isaac's younger twin, later named Israel.
- Edom: "red," Esau's nickname and later the name of his nation.

Chapter 25 Study Questions

1. To whom did Abraham give all that he had, and what did he do for his other sons? (25:5-6)

2. How old was Abraham when he died, and how does Scripture describe his death? (25:7-8)

3. Isaac and Ishmael buried their father together (25:9). What do you think that moment meant for two brothers who had been separated so long?

4. How did God keep His promise about Ishmael? (25:16; 17:20)

5. What did Isaac do about Rebekah's barrenness, and how long did they wait? (25:21, 26)

6. What did the LORD tell Rebekah about her twins? (25:23)

7. How are Esau and Jacob described as they grew up, and which parent favored which son? (25:27-28)

8. Jacob schemed, and Esau despised his birthright (25:31-34). Why do you think Moses puts the main blame on Esau?

9. Esau traded something lasting for something that satisfied him for only a moment. Where are you tempted to do the same?

10. Favoritism caused great pain in this family. How can parents, and church families, guard against it?

Chapter 26: Isaac and the Philistines

Scripture

26:1-11 And ***there*** was a famine in the land, besides the former famine which was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, to Gerar. And the LORD appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land which I will tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you; for to you and to your seed I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and I will give to your seed all these lands; and all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by your seed, because Abraham listened to My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." And Isaac dwelt in Gerar. And the men of the place asked about his wife, and he said, "She ***is*** my sister," for he was afraid to say, "My wife," ***thinking***, "Lest the men of the place kill me on account of Rebekah, for she ***is*** good of appearance." And it happened, when the days had been long for him there, and Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down through the window and saw, and look, Isaac ***was*** playing with Rebekah his wife. And Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Surely, look, she ***is*** your wife! And how did you say, 'She ***is*** my sister'?" And Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'Lest I die on account of her.'" And Abimelech said, "What ***is*** this you have done to us? One of the people nearly lay with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." And Abimelech commanded all the people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

26:12-33 And Isaac sowed in that land and found in that year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him. And the man became great, and he kept on going and becoming great until he had become exceedingly great. And he had livestock of flocks and livestock of herds and many servants; and the Philistines envied him. And all the wells which the servants of his father had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped them up and filled them ***with*** dust. And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you have become much mightier than we." And Isaac went from there and camped in the wadi of Gerar, and he dwelt there. And Isaac again dug the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham; and he called their names according to the names which his father had called them. And the servants of Isaac dug in the wadi and found there a well of living water. And the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with the herdsmen of Isaac, saying, "The water ***is*** ours." And he called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him. And they dug another well, and they quarreled over it also; and he called its name Sitnah. And he moved on from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; and he called its name Rehoboth, and he said, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we will be fruitful in the land." And he went up from there ***to*** Beersheba. And the LORD appeared to him in that night and said, "I ***am*** the God of Abraham your father. Do not be afraid, for I ***am*** with you, and I will bless you and will multiply your seed for the sake of Abraham My servant." And he built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD, and he pitched his tent there; and the servants of Isaac dug a well there. And Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath his friend, and Phicol the commander of his army. And Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, and you, you hate me and have sent me away from you?" And they said, "We have surely seen that the

LORD has been with you; and we said, 'Let there be, please, an oath between us, between us and you, and let us cut a covenant with you, that you will do no harm with us, just as we have not touched you, and just as we have done with you only good and have sent you away in peace.' You ***are*** now the blessed of the LORD." And he made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. And they rose early in the morning and swore, each to his brother; and Isaac sent them away, and they went from him in peace. And it happened on that day, and the servants of Isaac came and told him concerning the well which they had dug, and they said to him, "We have found water." And he called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city ***is*** Beersheba to this day.

26:34-35 And Esau was a son of forty years, and he took ***as*** a wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. And they were a bitterness of spirit to Isaac and to Rebekah.

Chapter 26 Preview

Genesis 26 is the one chapter where Isaac himself is at the center of the story. He lived a quieter life than his father Abraham or his son Jacob, but this chapter shows that the God of Abraham was now Isaac's God too. When famine comes, the LORD appears to Isaac, tells him not to go down to Egypt and passes on to him the covenant promises He swore to Abraham.

Isaac does not always do well. In Gerar he repeats his father's old sin and says that Rebekah is his sister. Yet God protects him and blesses him with a hundredfold harvest, so much that the Philistines envy him and fill in his wells. Isaac keeps moving and keeps digging, refusing to fight, until God makes room for him. In the end, the very king who sent him away comes asking for a peace treaty, saying, "You are now the blessed of the LORD."

Chapter 26 Study

26:1-5 *And **there** was a famine in the land, besides the former famine which was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, to Gerar. And the LORD appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land which I will tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you; for to you and to your seed I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and I will give to your seed all these lands; and all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by your seed, because Abraham listened to My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."*

Another famine struck Canaan, like the one in Abraham's day (12:10). Isaac went to Gerar, a town in the western Negeb, toward the coast, to "Abimelech king of the Philistines." As at 21:32, we aren't told how these early "Philistines" of Gerar were related to the later Philistine nation. This was probably not the same Abimelech Abraham met many decades before. The name may have been a royal title (see chapter 20), or this king may have been a son or grandson of the earlier one.

There "the LORD appeared to him." This is the first time Scripture tells us God appeared to Isaac. His command was clear: "Do not go down to Egypt." Abraham had gone to Egypt in a famine and gotten into trouble there. Isaac was to stay in the land.

God then gave Isaac the same promises He made to Abraham: His presence, His blessing, the land, descendants as many as the stars, and "all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by your seed." The covenant passed to Isaac, and God called it "the oath which I swore to Abraham your father." God's covenant was not up for renegotiation in each generation. He simply confirmed it.

God said He would do this "because Abraham listened to My voice." Abraham's obedience didn't earn the covenant. He had been declared righteous by faith long before (15:6). But his life of obedience showed that his faith was real, and God honored it. Our faithfulness today can be a blessing to our children and grandchildren after us.

New Testament links: Luke 1:73 (alluded to)

26:6-11 *And Isaac dwelt in Gerar. And the men of the place asked about his wife, and he said, "She **is** my sister," for he was afraid to say, "My wife," **thinking**, "Lest the men of the place kill me on account of Rebekah, for she **is** good of appearance." And it happened, when the days had been long for him there, and Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down through the window and saw, and look, Isaac **was** playing with Rebekah his wife. And Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Surely, look, she **is** your wife! And how did you say, 'She **is** my sister'?" And Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'Lest I die on account of her.'" And Abimelech said, "What **is** this you have done to us? One of the people nearly lay with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." And Abimelech commanded all the people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."*

Isaac obeyed and stayed in Gerar. But when the men there asked about Rebekah, he said, "She is my sister." He was afraid they would kill him to take her, "for she is good of appearance." Rebekah was his cousin's daughter.

Abraham had told a half-truth like this twice, since Sarah really was his half sister (12:13; 20:2, 12). Isaac went further. Rebekah was not his sister at all, so this was a plain lie. Sins often get passed down in families. The fears and habits of one generation show up in the next unless God breaks the pattern. Isaac had just heard God say, "I will be with you." He let fear crowd out that promise.

After a long time, Abimelech looked out a window and saw Isaac "playing with Rebekah his wife." It was clear they were not brother and sister. The king called Isaac in and scolded him: "What is this you have done to us?" Once again, a pagan king had to correct a man of God.

Even so, God protected Isaac and Rebekah. Abimelech ordered that anyone who touched them "shall surely be put to death." God's faithfulness did not depend on Isaac's faithfulness.

26:12-16 *And Isaac sowed in that land and found in that year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him. And the man became great, and he kept on going and becoming great until he had become exceedingly great. And he had livestock of flocks and livestock of herds and many servants; and the Philistines envied him. And all the wells which the servants of his father had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped them up and filled them* ***with*** *dust. And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you have become much mightier than we."*

"Isaac sowed in that land and found in that year a hundredfold." In a time of famine, Isaac's crop came back one hundred times what he planted. Good farming alone could not explain that. "And the LORD blessed him."

Isaac kept growing richer "until he had become exceedingly great." He had flocks, herds and a great household of servants. And "the Philistines envied him." Blessing often draws envy. When God is good to someone, not everyone around them is glad about it.

The Philistines showed their envy by filling Abraham's old wells with dirt. In a dry land, stopping up a man's well was an act of hostility. It was meant to drive him out. Then Abimelech told Isaac plainly, "Go away from us, for you have become much mightier than we."

26:17-22 *And Isaac went from there and camped in the wadi of Gerar, and he dwelt there. And Isaac again dug the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham; and he called their names according to the names which his father had called them. And the servants of Isaac dug in the wadi and found there a well of living water. And the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with the herdsmen of Isaac, saying, "The water* ***is*** *ours." And he called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him. And they dug another well, and they quarreled over it also; and he called its name Sitnah. And he moved on from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; and he called its name Rehoboth, and he said, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we will be fruitful in the land."*

Isaac did not fight. He moved to the valley of Gerar and began reopening the wells his father had dug. He even gave them "the names which his father had called them." Isaac honored his father's work and his father's faith. There is something good about going back to the old wells, the truths and practices that sustained the generations before us.

Then his servants dug a new well and struck "living water." Living water means a spring. That was a great prize. But the local herdsmen claimed it: "The water is ours!" Isaac named that well Esek, which means "contention" or "quarrel." They dug another, and the herdsmen fought over that one too. He named it Sitnah, which means "opposition" or "hostility."

Isaac kept moving. He dug a third well, and this time no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth, meaning broad places, or room, and said, "For now the LORD has made room for us." Isaac was a man of peace. He let others take what was his rather than fight for it, and God gave him room in the end. Paul says, "If possible, so far as it is from you, being at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18). Sometimes the way of peace means letting go and trusting God to provide.

26:23-25 *And he went up from there **to** Beersheba. And the LORD appeared to him in that night and said, "I **am** the God of Abraham your father. Do not be afraid, for I **am** with you, and I will bless you and will multiply your seed for the sake of Abraham My servant." And he built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD, and he pitched his tent there; and the servants of Isaac dug a well there.*

Isaac moved up to Beersheba, where his father had lived. "The LORD appeared to him in that night." God came to Isaac right after he chose peace.

God said, "I am the God of Abraham your father." Then the most comforting words in the chapter: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you." Isaac had been pushed from place to place. He had been lied about, envied and driven out. Now God reminded him that He was with him, and He renewed the promise "for the sake of Abraham My servant."

Isaac responded the way his father always had. He "built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD." Then he pitched his tent and his servants dug a well. Worship came first, then home, then work.

26:26-31 *And Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath his friend, and Phicol the commander of his army. And Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, and you, you hate me and have sent me away from you?" And they said, "We have surely seen that the LORD has been with you; and we said, 'Let there be, please, an oath between us, between us and you, and let us cut a covenant with you, that you will do no harm with us, just as we have not touched you, and just as we have done with you only good and have sent you away in peace.' You **are** now the blessed of the LORD." And he made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. And they rose early in the morning and swore, each to his brother; and Isaac sent them away, and they went from him in peace.*

Abimelech came from Gerar with his adviser Ahuzzath and Phicol, the commander of his army. Isaac was blunt: "Why have you come to me?" he asked. "You, you hate me and have sent me away."

Their answer is remarkable: "We have surely seen that the LORD has been with you." They had driven Isaac away, but they could not stop God from blessing him. Now they wanted a covenant, a treaty of peace, so that Isaac would do them no harm. They even called him "blessed of the LORD."

They also bent the truth a little, claiming they had "done with you only good" and sent him away "in peace." Isaac could have argued. Instead, he made them a feast. In the morning they swore oaths and parted in peace.

Proverbs 16:7 says that when a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. Isaac's patience did more than any fight could have done.

26:32-33 *And it happened on that day, and the servants of Isaac came and told him concerning the well which they had dug, and they said to him, "We have found water." And he called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city **is** Beersheba to this day.*

That same day, Isaac's servants came with good news: "We have found water." Isaac named the well Shibah, which sounds like the Hebrew words for "oath" and "seven." That is why the city is called Beersheba, the well of the oath.

Abraham had named a well Beersheba after his own treaty with Abimelech (21:31). The old name may have fallen out of use when the Philistines stopped up the wells. Now Isaac, after a new treaty, gave the place its name again. The son walked in the steps of his father, and God was faithful to both.

26:34-35 *And Esau was a son of forty years, and he took **as** a wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. And they were a bitterness of spirit to Isaac and to Rebekah.*

The chapter ends on a sour note. At forty, the same age Isaac was when he married (25:20), Esau married two Hittite women, Judith and Basemath. Abraham had gone to great lengths to keep Isaac from marrying a Canaanite (24:3). Esau did not care. He married women who did not know the LORD, and he took two wives at once.

"They were a bitterness of spirit to Isaac and to Rebekah." Esau's choices showed again that he did not value the covenant. He had despised his birthright, and now he despised his family's faith. These two verses set the stage for the painful events of chapter 27.

Chapter 26 Summary

During a famine, Isaac went to Gerar, and the LORD appeared to him, told him not to go to Egypt and confirmed to him the covenant promises He had sworn to Abraham. In Gerar Isaac lied, saying Rebekah was his sister, but Abimelech discovered the truth and protected them. God blessed Isaac with a hundredfold harvest and great wealth, and the envious Philistines stopped up his wells and sent him away. Isaac reopened his father's wells and dug new ones, moving on from Esek and Sitnah until he found room at Rehoboth. At Beersheba the LORD appeared to him again and said, "Do not be afraid, for I am with you." Isaac built an altar, and Abimelech came to make a peace treaty, admitting that the LORD was with him. Esau's marriage to two Hittite women brought grief to his parents.

People and Places

- Esek: "contention," a well the herdsmen of Gerar fought over.
- Sitnah: "opposition," a second disputed well.
- Rehoboth: broad places, or room; the well where no one quarreled.
- Ahuzzath: Abimelech's adviser.

Chapter 26 Study Questions

1. Why did God tell Isaac not to go down to Egypt, and what did He promise him? (26:2-4)

2. What sin did Isaac repeat from his father's life, and why did he do it? (26:7)

3. A pagan king had to correct Isaac (26:9-10). Why is it so damaging when unbelievers see believers being dishonest?

4. How did God bless Isaac in the land, and how did the Philistines respond? (26:12-15)

5. What did Isaac do when the herdsmen quarreled over his wells? (26:19-22)

6. What did the LORD say to Isaac at Beersheba, and how did Isaac respond? (26:24-25)

7. Abimelech came seeking peace because "the LORD has been with you" (26:28). How did Isaac's patience do more than a fight could have done?

8. Why did Esau's marriages bring grief to Isaac and Rebekah? (26:34-35)

9. Isaac repeated his father's sin. What patterns from your family do you need God's help to break?

10. Isaac chose to move on rather than fight over his wells. When is it right for a believer to let go of what is ours for the sake of peace?

Chapter 27: The Stolen Blessing

Scripture

27:1-17 And it happened, when Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, and he called Esau his elder son and said to him, "My son." And he said to him, "Here I am." And he said, "Look, please, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. And now, please take up your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me; and make savory food for me such as I love, and bring ***it*** to me, and let me eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die." And Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt game, to bring ***it***. And Rebekah said to Jacob her son, saying, "Look, I heard your father speaking to Esau your brother, saying, 'Bring me game and make savory food for me, and let me eat, and let me bless you before the LORD before my death.' And now, my son, listen to my voice, to that which I am commanding you. Please go to the flock and take for me from there two good kids of the goats, and let me make them savory food for your father, such as he loves. And you will bring ***it*** to your father, and he will eat, so that he may bless you before his death." And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Look, Esau my brother ***is*** a hairy man, and I ***am*** a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I will be in his eyes like a mocker, and I will bring on myself a curse and not a blessing." And his mother said to him, "On me ***be*** your curse, my son; only listen to my voice, and go, take ***them*** for me." And he went and took ***them*** and brought ***them*** to his mother; and his mother made savory food, such as his father loved. And Rebekah took the choice garments of Esau her elder son, which ***were*** with her in the house, and she clothed Jacob her younger son. And the skins of the kids of the goats she put on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. And she put the savory food and the bread which she had made into the hand of Jacob her son.

27:18-29 And he came to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who ***are*** you, my son?" And Jacob said to his father, "I ***am*** Esau your firstborn. I have done just as you spoke to me. Please arise, sit and eat of my game, so that your soul may bless me." And Isaac said to his son, "What ***is*** this ***that*** you have been quick to find ***it***, my son?" And he said, "Because the LORD your God made ***it*** happen before me." And Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you ***are*** really my son Esau or not." And Jacob came near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice ***is*** the voice of Jacob, and the hands ***are*** the hands of Esau." And he did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy, like the hands of Esau his brother; and he blessed him. And he said, "Are you really my son Esau?" And he said, "I ***am***." And he said, "Bring ***it*** near to me, and let me eat of the game of my son, so that my soul may bless you." And he brought ***it*** near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. And Isaac his father said to him, "Please come near and kiss me, my son." And he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and he blessed him and said, "See, the smell of my son ***is*** like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed. And may God give you of the dew of the heavens, and of the fatness of the earth, and abundance of grain and new wine. Let peoples serve you, and let nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and let the sons of your mother bow down to you. Cursed ***be*** those who curse you, and blessed ***be*** those who bless you."

27:30-40 And it happened, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and it happened, Jacob had only just gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, and Esau his brother came in from

his hunting. And he also made savory food and brought ***it*** to his father; and he said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of the game of his son, so that your soul may bless me." And Isaac his father said to him, "Who ***are*** you?" And he said, "I ***am*** your son, your firstborn, Esau." And Isaac trembled ***with*** a very great trembling, and he said, "Who then ***is*** he who hunted game and brought ***it*** to me, and I ate of all before you came, and I blessed him? Yes, he will be blessed." When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out ***with*** a great and very bitter cry, and he said to his father, "Bless me, me also, my father!" And he said, "Your brother came with deceit and took your blessing." And he said, "Is it because ***one*** called his name Jacob that he has supplanted me these two times? My birthright he took, and look, now he has taken my blessing." And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" And Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Look, I have made him lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to him as servants, and ***with*** grain and new wine I have sustained him. And for you then, what shall I do, my son?" And Esau said to his father, "Is it one blessing you have, my father? Bless me, me also, my father!" And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. And Isaac his father answered and said to him, "Look, from the fatness of the earth will be your dwelling, and from the dew of the heavens from above. And by your sword you will live, and your brother you will serve; and it will be, when you break loose, that you will tear his yoke from off your neck."

27:41-46 And Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said in his heart, "The days of mourning for my father are drawing near, and I will kill Jacob my brother." And the words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah; and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and she said to him, "Look, Esau your brother is comforting himself concerning you, to kill you. And now, my son, listen to my voice, and arise, flee for yourself to Laban my brother, to Haran. And you will stay with him a few days, until the fury of your brother turns back, until the anger of your brother turns back from you and he forgets what you did to him; and I will send and take you from there. Why should I be bereaved also of both of you in one day?" And Rebekah said to Isaac, "I loathe my life because of the daughters of Heth. If Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, what ***is*** life to me?"

Chapter 27 Preview

An old man who can barely see is about to give away the blessing of Abraham, and his wife is listening. Isaac plans to give his special blessing to Esau, his favorite, even though God had said the older would serve the younger. Rebekah overhears and plots with Jacob to deceive Isaac and steal the blessing. Jacob dresses in his brother's clothes, covers his arms with goatskins and lies to his father's face, even using the LORD's name in the lie.

The plan works, but at a terrible cost. Esau comes home and cries out in bitter grief, and he vows to kill his brother. Rebekah has to send Jacob away to her brother Laban, and as far as Scripture tells us, she never sees her favorite son again. Every person in this chapter sins. Yet God's purpose stands, and the blessing goes where He had said it would go from the beginning.

Chapter 27 Study

27:1-4 *And it happened, when Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, and he called Esau his elder son and said to him, "My son." And he said to him, "Here I am." And he said, "Look, please, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. And now, please take up your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me; and make savory food for me such as I love, and bring* ***it*** *to me, and let me eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die."*

Isaac was old, and "his eyes were too dim to see." He thought he might die soon, though in fact he would live many more years (35:28). He called Esau and asked him to hunt game and make "savory food for me such as I love," so that "my soul may bless you before I die."

In the time of the patriarchs, a father's final blessing was a solemn thing. It was more than a wish: a spoken word that passed on the family's leadership and, in this family, the covenant promises God had made to Abraham. Once given, it could not be taken back.

Isaac had very likely heard what God said to Rebekah before the twins were born: "the elder will serve the younger" (25:23). He knew Esau had married Hittite women, and he may have known about the sold birthright. Yet he planned to bless Esau anyway, and to do it privately. His appetite and his favoritism were driving him, as they had for years (25:28). If he knew God's word, he was trying to work against it.

27:5-10 *And Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt game, to bring* ***it****. And Rebekah said to Jacob her son, saying, "Look, I heard your father speaking to Esau your brother, saying, 'Bring me game and make savory food for me, and let me eat, and let me bless you before the LORD before my death.' And now, my son, listen to my voice, to that which I am commanding you. Please go to the flock and take for me from there two good kids of the goats, and let me make them savory food for your father, such as he loves. And you will bring* ***it*** *to your father, and he will eat, so that he may bless you before his death."*

"Rebekah was listening." She overheard and moved fast. She called Jacob and told him what she had heard. Then she gave him orders: "listen to my voice, to that which I am commanding you."

Rebekah's plan was simple. Jacob would bring two young goats, she would cook them the way Isaac liked, and Jacob would take the meal in and receive the blessing.

Rebekah was right about God's promise. Jacob was the one God had chosen. But she was wrong about how to get there. Instead of trusting God to keep His word, she chose deception. She did not pray. She did not speak to her husband. She schemed. Like Sarah with Hagar years before, she tried to help God along by doing wrong. God does not need our sin to accomplish His will. The end never justifies sinful means.

27:11-13 *And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Look, Esau my brother **is** a hairy man, and I **am** a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I will be in his eyes like a mocker, and I will bring on myself a curse and not a blessing." And his mother said to him, "On me **be** your curse, my son; only listen to my voice, and go, take **them** for me."*

Jacob's objection is revealing. His only worry was getting caught, not whether it was wrong. Esau was hairy, and Jacob was smooth. If Isaac touched him, the trick would be exposed, and Jacob would bring "a curse and not a blessing" on himself.

Rebekah answered, "On me be your curse, my son." She was willing to take any curse on herself. It sounds like great love for her son, and maybe it was. But it was also reckless. In the end she did bear the cost, as we will see.

"Only listen to my voice." There is a sad echo of these words later, when Rebekah has to tell Jacob to obey her voice and run for his life (27:43).

27:14-17 *And he went and took **them** and brought **them** to his mother; and his mother made savory food, such as his father loved. And Rebekah took the choice garments of Esau her elder son, which **were** with her in the house, and she clothed Jacob her younger son. And the skins of the kids of the goats she put on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. And she put the savory food and the bread which she had made into the hand of Jacob her son.*

Jacob went along with it. Rebekah "made savory food, such as his father loved." Then she dressed Jacob in Esau's best clothes, which she kept in the house, so that he would smell like his brother. She put goatskins on his hands and the smooth part of his neck so he would feel hairy.

The whole household was now caught up in the lie. The mother planned it, the son carried it out and the father was the target. The family God had chosen to bless the world was acting like any family with no faith at all.

27:18-20 *And he came to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who **are** you, my son?" And Jacob said to his father, "I **am** Esau your firstborn. I have done just as you spoke to me. Please arise, sit and eat of my game, so that your soul may bless me." And Isaac said to his son, "What **is** this **that** you have been quick to find **it**, my son?" And he said, "Because the LORD your God made **it** happen before me."*

Jacob went in and said, "My father." Isaac answered, "Who are you, my son?" Jacob looked his blind father in the face and lied: "I am Esau your firstborn."

Isaac was suspicious. How had the game been found so quickly? Jacob's answer was the worst lie of all: "Because the LORD your God made it happen before me." He used God's name to cover his sin. One of the Ten Commandments would later forbid taking the name of the LORD in vain (Exodus 20:7). Jacob called Him "the LORD your God," not my God. At this point in his life, Jacob did not yet speak of the LORD as his own.

27:21-25 *And Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you **are** really my son Esau or not." And Jacob came near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice **is** the voice of Jacob, and the hands **are** the hands of Esau." And he did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy, like the hands of Esau his brother; and he blessed him. And he said, "Are you really my son Esau?" And he said, "I **am**." And he said, "Bring **it** near to me, and let me eat of the game of my son, so that my soul may bless you." And he brought **it** near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank.*

Isaac was still unsure. "Please come near, that I may feel you." Jacob came close, and his father touched the goatskins. Then Isaac said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, and the hands are the hands of Esau." His ears told him the truth, but his hands told him a lie, and he trusted his hands.

Isaac asked one more time: "Are you really my son Esau?" And Jacob said simply, "I am." Lie upon lie. Once a person starts down the road of deception, it is hard to turn back. Each lie needs another to hold it up.

Isaac ate the meal and drank the wine. He was satisfied that the man in front of him was Esau.

27:26-29 *And Isaac his father said to him, "Please come near and kiss me, my son." And he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and he blessed him and said, "See, the smell of my son **is** like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed. And may God give you of the dew of the heavens, and of the fatness of the earth, and abundance of grain and new wine. Let peoples serve you, and let nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and let the sons of your mother bow down to you. Cursed **be** those who curse you, and blessed **be** those who bless you."*

"Please come near and kiss me, my son." Jacob kissed his father, and Isaac smelled Esau's clothes. "See, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed."

Then came the blessing. It asked God to give "the dew of the heavens," "the fatness of the earth," and plenty of grain and wine, a picture of a fruitful land. It promised rule: "Let peoples serve you, and let nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers." And it ended with words that echo God's promise to Abraham: "Cursed be those who curse you, and blessed be those who bless you" (12:3).

Isaac thought he was blessing Esau. But God was guiding the blessing to Jacob, just as He had said He would. Hebrews 11:20 says, "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come." Isaac's faith was weak and his methods were wrong, but the words he spoke were God's words, and they came true.

27:30-33 *And it happened, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and it happened, Jacob had only just gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, and Esau his brother came in from his hunting. And he also made savory food and brought* ***it*** *to his father; and he said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of the game of his son, so that your soul may bless me." And Isaac his father said to him, "Who* ***are*** *you?" And he said, "I* ***am*** *your son, your firstborn, Esau." And Isaac trembled* ***with*** *a very great trembling, and he said, "Who then* ***is*** *he who hunted game and brought* ***it*** *to me, and I ate of all before you came, and I blessed him? Yes, he will be blessed."*

Jacob had "only just gone out from the presence of Isaac his father," and then "Esau his brother came in from his hunting." He made the meal and brought it to his father: "Let my father arise and eat."

"Who are you?" Isaac asked. "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau."

"Isaac trembled with a very great trembling." Why such a reaction? He had been fooled, but there was more. Isaac realized that God had overruled him. He had tried to bless the son God had not chosen, and God had steered the blessing to the right son in spite of him. Isaac did not try to take it back. He said, "Yes, he will be blessed." In that moment, Isaac seems to have bowed to the will of God.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:20 (alluded to)

27:34-38 *When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out* ***with*** *a great and very bitter cry, and he said to his father, "Bless me, me also, my father!" And he said, "Your brother came with deceit and took your blessing." And he said, "Is it because* ***one*** *called his name Jacob that he has supplanted me these two times? My birthright he took, and look, now he has taken my blessing." And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" And Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Look, I have made him lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to him as servants, and* ***with*** *grain and new wine I have sustained him. And for you then, what shall I do, my son?" And Esau said to his father, "Is it one blessing you have, my father? Bless me, me also, my father!" And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.*

Esau "cried out with a great and very bitter cry." "Bless me, me also, my father!"

Isaac explained that Jacob had come "with deceit" and taken the blessing. Esau answered with bitter words about his brother's name: "Is it because one called his name Jacob that he has supplanted me these two times?" The name Jacob sounds like the Hebrew for one who supplants, who takes someone's place by trickery. Esau blamed Jacob for the birthright too, though he himself had sold it willingly (25:33).

"Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" Isaac had given Jacob mastery, servants, grain and wine. What was left? "Is it one blessing you have, my father?" And Esau "lifted up his voice and wept."

We should feel sorrow for Esau. He was wronged. But Hebrews 12:17 says that even when he "sought it with tears," he "found no place of repentance." Esau wept over losing the blessing, not over the way he had despised it. There is a kind of sorrow that grieves the loss of the benefits but never turns to God (2 Corinthians 7:10).

New Testament links: Hebrews 12:17 (alluded to)

27:39-40 *And Isaac his father answered and said to him, "Look, from the fatness of the earth will be your dwelling, and from the dew of the heavens from above. And by your sword you will live, and your brother you will serve; and it will be, when you break loose, that you will tear his yoke from off your neck."*

Isaac did speak a word over Esau, but it was very different from Jacob's. "Look, from the fatness of the earth will be your dwelling, and from the dew of the heavens from above." The Hebrew word "from" can also mean "away from," and that is how it turned out. The land of Edom, south and east of the Dead Sea, is rugged and dry.

"And by your sword you will live, and your brother you will serve." Esau's descendants would live hard lives, often at war, and would be under Israel. This came true. King David conquered Edom (2 Samuel 8:14).

"And it will be, when you break loose, that you will tear his yoke from off your neck." This came true as well. Years later, in the days of King Jehoram of Judah, Edom revolted and set up its own king (2 Kings 8:20-22). Isaac's words reached hundreds of years into the future.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:20 (alluded to)

27:41-45 *And Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said in his heart, "The days of mourning for my father are drawing near, and I will kill Jacob my brother." And the words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah; and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and she said to him, "Look, Esau your brother is comforting himself concerning you, to kill you. And now, my son, listen to my voice, and arise, flee for yourself to Laban my brother, to Haran. And you will stay with him a few days, until the fury of your brother turns back, until the anger of your brother turns back from you and he forgets what you did to him; and I will send and take you from there. Why should I be bereaved also of both of you in one day?"*

"Esau held a grudge against Jacob." He told himself he would wait until his father died and then "kill Jacob my brother." The grudge became a plan for murder. Esau was repeating the sin of Cain (4:8). Hatred left to grow in the heart will always look for a way out.

Someone told Rebekah. Once again she took charge: "listen to my voice, and arise, flee for yourself to Laban my brother, to Haran!" She told Jacob to stay "a few days" until Esau calmed down. Those few days turned into twenty years (31:38, 41). Scripture never records that Rebekah saw Jacob again. Her death is not even described in Genesis. Only her nurse's death and her burial place are mentioned later (35:8; 49:31).

"Why should I be bereaved also of both of you in one day?" If Esau killed Jacob, he would be put to death or flee for murder, and she would lose both sons. Deception had brought her family to the edge of ruin. Paul warns that whatever a man sows, "this he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Jacob deceived his father with a goat and his brother's clothes. Years later his own sons will deceive him with a goat and their brother's coat (37:31-33).

27:46 *And Rebekah said to Isaac, "I loathe my life because of the daughters of Heth. If Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, what* ***is*** *life to me?"*

Rebekah still had to get Isaac to send Jacob away. She did not tell him about Esau's threat. Instead she spoke of Esau's Hittite wives: "I loathe my life because of the daughters of Heth." If Jacob married a local woman too, what would her life be worth?

Her concern about the Hittite wives was real (26:35). But she used it to steer her husband again, without telling him the whole truth. It worked. In the next chapter Isaac sends Jacob to Paddan-aram to find a wife.

For all the sin in this chapter, God's plan moved forward. He did not approve of the lies. Every person paid a price for them. But God was faithful to His word that "the elder will serve the younger." He works through broken people and broken families, not because their sin is good, but because His grace is greater (Romans 8:28). That is good news for every family that has made a mess of things.

Chapter 27 Summary

Old and nearly blind, Isaac planned to bless Esau privately, even though God had said the older would serve the younger. Rebekah overheard and had Jacob disguise himself as Esau with his brother's clothes and goatskins. Jacob lied to his father, even using the LORD's name, and Isaac gave him the blessing of the firstborn, with abundance, rule over his brothers and the promise that those who blessed him would be blessed. When Esau returned, Isaac trembled violently and confirmed that Jacob would be blessed. Esau wept bitterly and received a lesser word, that he would live by the sword and serve his brother until he broke his yoke. Esau planned to kill Jacob, so Rebekah arranged for Jacob to flee to her brother Laban in Haran. God's purpose stood, but deception brought deep pain to everyone in the family.

Chapter 27 Study Questions

1. What did Isaac ask Esau to do, and why? (27:1-4)

2. God's word about the twins was given to Rebekah (25:23). Do you think Isaac knew it, and how does that change the way we read his plan? (27:1-4)

3. What was Jacob's main worry about his mother's plan? (27:11-12)

4. How did Rebekah disguise Jacob? (27:15-16)

5. How did Jacob use God's name in his lie? (27:20)

6. What blessings did Isaac give to Jacob? (27:27-29)

7. Isaac "trembled with a very great trembling" and then said, "he will be blessed" (27:33). What do you think Isaac realized in that moment?

8. What did Esau plan to do, and how did Rebekah respond? (27:41-45)

9. Rebekah and Jacob tried to reach God's goal by sinful means. Where are you tempted to "help God out" in ways that don't honor Him?

10. God's purpose stood even in a broken family. How does that give you hope for your own family?

Chapter 28: Jacob's Ladder

Scripture

28:1-9 And Isaac called to Jacob, and he blessed him, and he commanded him and said to him, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, the father of your mother, and take for yourself from there a wife from the daughters of Laban, the brother of your mother. And may God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and you shall become an assembly of peoples. And may He give to you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your seed with you, ***for*** you to possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham." And Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau. And Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him away to Paddan-aram to take for himself a wife from there, and ***that*** when he blessed him he commanded him, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," and ***that*** Jacob had listened to his father and to his mother, and had gone to Paddan-aram. And Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan ***were*** evil in the eyes of Isaac his father. And Esau went to Ishmael, and he took Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, the son of Abraham, the sister of Nebaioth, in addition to his wives, for himself for a wife.

28:10-22 And Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came upon the place, and he lodged there, for the sun had set; and he took from the stones of the place, and he put ***it*** at his head, and he lay down in that place. And he dreamed, and look, a stairway ***was*** set up on the earth, and its top ***was*** reaching toward the heavens; and look, the angels of God ***were*** going up and going down on it. And look, the LORD ***was*** standing above it, and He said, "I ***am*** the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you are lying, to you I will give it, and to your seed. And your seed shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out toward the west and toward the east and toward the north and toward the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the ground shall be blessed. And look, I ***am*** with you, and I will keep you in all ***places*** where you go, and I will bring you back to this ground; for I will not forsake you until I have done what I have spoken to you." And Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I, I did not know ***it***." And he was afraid and said, "How awesome ***is*** this place! This ***is*** nothing other than the house of God, and this ***is*** the gate of the heavens." And Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put at his head, and he set it up ***as*** a pillar, and he poured oil on its top. And he called the name of that place Bethel; but Luz ***was*** the name of the city at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me on this way on which I am going, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and I return in peace to the house of my father, and the LORD will be God to me, and this stone, which I have set up ***as*** a pillar, will be the house of God; and all that You give me, I will surely give a tenth of it to You."

Chapter 28 Preview

Jacob leaves home in a hurry, running from a brother who wants to kill him. Before he goes, Isaac blesses him again, this time knowingly, and passes on to him "the blessing of Abraham." Esau,

seeing that his Canaanite wives displease his father, tries to fix things by marrying a daughter of Ishmael.

On his first night alone on the road, Jacob sleeps on the ground with a stone for a pillow. God meets him in a dream: a ladder stretching from earth to heaven, angels going up and down on it and the LORD standing above it, repeating to Jacob the promises He made to Abraham and Isaac. Jacob had schemed his way into the blessing, but now God gives it to him by grace. Jacob wakes in awe, names the place Bethel, "house of God," and makes a vow. Jesus Himself later points to this ladder and says that He is the way between heaven and earth.

Chapter 28 Study

28:1-2 *And Isaac called to Jacob, and he blessed him, and he commanded him and said to him, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, the father of your mother, and take for yourself from there a wife from the daughters of Laban, the brother of your mother.*

Isaac called Jacob and "blessed him." This time there was no disguise and no trick. Isaac knew exactly whom he was blessing. He had accepted what God had done (27:33), and now he blessed Jacob with his eyes open.

Isaac also gave a charge, a command: "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan." He sent Jacob to his mother's family in Paddan-aram, to find a wife among the daughters of Laban. Isaac was doing for Jacob what Abraham had done for him in chapter 24, protecting the family of promise from the idolatry of Canaan.

28:3-5 *And may God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and you shall become an assembly of peoples. And may He give to you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your seed with you,* ***for*** *you to possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham." And Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.*

Isaac prayed for Jacob in the name of "God Almighty." This is El Shaddai, the name God used with Abraham (17:1).

He asked that Jacob would become "an assembly of peoples." And he passed on "the blessing of Abraham," including the land: "for you to possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham." Jacob was leaving that land. Yet his father blessed him with the promise that it would be his.

So Jacob set out for Paddan-aram. Moses mentions that Rebekah was "the mother of Jacob and Esau." Both sons were hers. In the middle of this broken story, she was losing them both, one to anger and one to exile.

New Testament links: Galatians 3:14 (alluded to)

28:6-9 *And Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him away to Paddan-aram to take for himself a wife from there, and **that** when he blessed him he commanded him, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," and **that** Jacob had listened to his father and to his mother, and had gone to Paddan-aram. And Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan **were** evil in the eyes of Isaac his father. And Esau went to Ishmael, and he took Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, the son of Abraham, the sister of Nebaioth, in addition to his wives, for himself for a wife.*

Esau watched all this. He saw that his father had blessed Jacob and told him not to marry a Canaanite, and that Jacob had obeyed. He finally realized that "the daughters of Canaan were evil in the eyes of Isaac his father."

So Esau went to Ishmael's family and married Mahalath, Ishmael's daughter. He meant well, maybe. But he missed the point. He did not send away his other wives; he just added a third. And he married into the line that God had set aside from the covenant (21:12). Esau was trying to please his father on the outside without understanding the faith behind his father's wishes. Religion that only tries to fix appearances never reaches the heart.

28:10-11 *And Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came upon the place, and he lodged there, for the sun had set; and he took from the stones of the place, and he put **it** at his head, and he lay down in that place.*

Jacob left Beersheba and headed north toward Haran, a journey of several hundred miles. He was alone. The son who was "dwelling in tents" (25:27) was now a fugitive.

At sunset "he came upon the place." Moses does not name it yet. Jacob took a stone, put it under his head, and lay down. He had no tent, no servants, no camels and no family. Abraham's servant had gone to Haran with ten camels and gifts (24:10). Jacob went with a walking stick (32:10). He had the blessing, but in that moment he had nothing else.

Jacob was at the lowest point of his life so far. And that is exactly where God met him. God often meets us when we have come to the end of ourselves.

28:12 *And he dreamed, and look, a stairway **was** set up on the earth, and its top **was** reaching toward the heavens; and look, the angels of God **were** going up and going down on it.*

Jacob dreamed of "a stairway." The Hebrew word appears only here in the Bible. It may mean a ladder, a stairway, or a ramp like the steps of a great tower. Most of us know it as Jacob's ladder, and that is what this study calls it. It "was set up on the earth, and its top was reaching toward the heavens." On it, "the angels of God were going up and going down."

The picture is of a way between earth and heaven, a connection God Himself provides. Jacob had tried to get God's blessing by his own cleverness. Here God shows him that the way to heaven is not something man builds from the bottom up. Unlike the tower of Babel, whose builders wanted its top to reach heaven (11:4), this ladder was God's doing.

Jesus gave us the meaning of this ladder. When He met Nathanael, one of His first disciples, He said, "you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John 1:51). "Son of Man" was Jesus' most common way of speaking of Himself (Daniel 7:13-14). Jesus is the ladder. He is the One who connects heaven and earth. He is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). Jacob saw the ladder in a dream, but we know His name.

New Testament links: John 1:51 (alluded to)

28:13-14 *And look, the LORD **was** standing above it, and He said, "I **am** the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you are lying, to you I will give it, and to your seed. And your seed shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out toward the west and toward the east and toward the north and toward the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the ground shall be blessed.*

"And look, the LORD was standing above it." God introduced Himself: "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac."

Then He gave Jacob the same covenant promises He had given to Abraham and Isaac. The land: "The land on which you are lying, to you I will give it, and to your seed." The descendants: "like the dust of the earth," spreading out in every direction. And the blessing to the world: "in you and in your seed all the families of the ground shall be blessed."

God did not tell him to clean up his life first and then be blessed. Jacob had just lied to his father and cheated his brother. God gave him the promise anyway. That is grace. The covenant rested on God's choice and God's faithfulness, not on Jacob's goodness. And the promise to bless all the families of the earth points forward to Christ, the Seed of Abraham, through whom people from every nation are blessed (Galatians 3:8, 16). I believe the promise of the land to Jacob's descendants still stands, and that God has not finished with Israel.

28:15 *And look, I **am** with you, and I will keep you in all **places** where you go, and I will bring you back to this ground; for I will not forsake you until I have done what I have spoken to you."*

Jacob was afraid, alone and heading into an unknown future. God spoke straight to his fears.

"Look, I am with you." Jacob was not alone after all.

"And I will keep you in all places where you go." Wherever Jacob went, God would watch over him.

"And I will bring you back to this ground." Jacob's exile would not be forever.

"For I will not forsake you until I have done what I have spoken to you." God would finish what He started. Paul says the same thing to every believer: He who began a good work in you will complete it (Philippians 1:6). Jesus promised His followers that He would be with them always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). If you belong to God through Christ, this promise has your name on it too.

28:16-17 *And Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I, I did not know **it**." And he was afraid and said, "How awesome **is** this place! This **is** nothing other than the house of God, and this **is** the gate of the heavens."*

Jacob woke up and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I, I did not know it." He had thought of God as the God of his father's tent and his father's altars. He had not expected to find Him in a lonely field in the middle of nowhere.

God is often closer than we realize. Many believers can look back on a dark time and say the same thing: the LORD was there, and I did not know it.

Jacob "was afraid." This was holy fear, awe at being in God's presence. "How awesome is this place! This is nothing other than the house of God, and this is the gate of the heavens." What made the place holy was not the stones or the ground. It was the presence of God.

28:18-19 *And Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put at his head, and he set it up **as** a pillar, and he poured oil on its top. And he called the name of that place Bethel; but Luz **was** the name of the city at the first.*

Early in the morning Jacob took the stone he had slept on and "set it up as a pillar." He poured oil on top of it. Oil was precious, and pouring it out was a way of setting something apart for God. The pillar was a marker, a memorial, so Jacob and others would remember what God did there. Jacob was marking the spot where God met him, not worshiping the stone.

He named the place Bethel, which means "house of God." The town nearby was called Luz. Bethel lay about eleven miles north of Jerusalem. It will become an important place in Jacob's story. God will send him back there years later (35:1). Sadly, many centuries later, one of Israel's kings would set up a golden calf at Bethel and turn it into a center of false worship (1 Kings 12:28-29). Places that once meant meeting with God can become empty religion if hearts turn away.

28:20-22 *And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me on this way on which I am going, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and I return in peace to the house of my father, and the LORD will be God to me, and this stone, which I have set up **as** a pillar, will be the house of God; and all that You give me, I will surely give a tenth of it to You."*

Jacob made a vow, a solemn promise to God. "If God will be with me, and will keep me on this way on which I am going," and give him food and clothing and bring him home safely, "and the LORD will be God to me."

Some read this as Jacob bargaining with God, still the schemer, making a deal. Others note that God had just promised all these things, and some think the Hebrew word for if carries the sense of since here, though its normal meaning is if. Jacob may have been repeating God's promises back to Him and committing himself in response. Either way, Jacob was a young believer with a long way to go. But he was beginning to respond to God. For the first time, he speaks of the LORD becoming "God to me."

Jacob promised that the stone would be "the house of God," and that "all that You give me, I will surely give a tenth of it to You." Abraham had given a tithe, a tenth, to Melchizedek (14:20). Here Jacob promises a tenth of everything God would give him. The order matters. Jacob would give back from what God first gave. Everything we have comes from God, and giving to Him is a way of saying so.

Chapter 28 Summary

Isaac knowingly blessed Jacob, told him not to marry a Canaanite and sent him to Paddan-aram with the blessing of Abraham. Esau tried to please his father by marrying a daughter of Ishmael. On the way to Haran, Jacob slept on the ground with a stone for a pillow and dreamed of a ladder reaching to heaven with angels ascending and descending on it. The LORD stood above it and gave Jacob the covenant promises of land, descendants and blessing to all families of the earth, and He promised to be with him, keep him, bring him back and never leave him. Jacob woke in awe, set up the stone as a pillar, named the place Bethel and vowed that the LORD would be his God and that he would give Him a tenth. Jesus later said He Himself is the ladder between heaven and earth.

People and Places

- Mahalath: Ishmael's daughter, Esau's third wife.
- Bethel: "house of God," the place where Jacob saw the ladder, formerly called Luz.

Chapter 28 Study Questions

1. What did Isaac command Jacob, and what blessing did he pass on to him? (28:1-4)

2. Esau tried to please his father by adding a third wife (28:8-9). Why did his effort miss the point?

3. Describe what Jacob saw in his dream. (28:12-13)

4. What promises did God give Jacob? (28:13-15)

5. How did Jesus explain the meaning of the ladder? (John 1:51)

6. What did Jacob say when he woke up? (28:16-17)

7. What did Jacob do with the stone, and what did he name the place? (28:18-19)

8. Some read Jacob's vow as a bargain, and others as a first response of faith (28:20-22). Which do you think it was, and why?

9. Jacob found God in a lonely place at a low point in his life. When has God met you in a hard time when you did not expect Him?

10. God promised Jacob, "I will not forsake you." How does that promise speak to something you are facing right now? (28:15)

Chapter 29: Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel

Scripture

29:1-14 And Jacob lifted up his feet and went to the land of the sons of the east. And he saw, and look, a well in the field, and look, three flocks of sheep ***were*** lying there beside it, for from that well they watered the flocks; and the stone on the mouth of the well ***was*** large. And all the flocks would be gathered there, and they would roll the stone from over the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and they would put the stone back over the mouth of the well, in its place. And Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where ***are*** you from?" And they said, "We ***are*** from Haran." And he said to them, "Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know ***him***." And he said to them, "***Is there*** peace for him?" And they said, "Peace. And look, Rachel his daughter ***is*** coming with the sheep." And he said, "Look, the day ***is*** still long; ***it is*** not the time for the livestock to be gathered. Water the sheep, and go, pasture ***them***." And they said, "We are not able, until all the flocks are gathered, and they roll the stone from over the mouth of the well; and ***then*** we water the sheep." He ***was*** still speaking with them, and Rachel came with the sheep that ***belonged*** to her father, for she ***was*** a shepherdess. And it came about, when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, and Jacob drew near and rolled the stone from over the mouth of the well, and he watered the sheep of Laban his mother's brother. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and he lifted up his voice and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he ***was*** her father's brother, and that he ***was*** the son of Rebekah; and she ran and told her father. And it came about, when Laban heard the report of Jacob his sister's son, and he ran to meet him, and he embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. And he recounted to Laban all these things. And Laban said to him, "Surely you ***are*** my bone and my flesh." And he stayed with him a month of days.

29:15-30 And Laban said to Jacob, "***Is it*** because you ***are*** my brother that you should serve me for nothing? Tell me, what ***will*** your wages ***be***?" And Laban had two daughters: the name of the older ***was*** Leah, and the name of the younger ***was*** Rachel. And the eyes of Leah ***were*** weak, and Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance. And Jacob loved Rachel, and he said, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter." And Laban said, "My giving her to you ***is*** better than my giving her to another man; stay with me." And Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they were in his eyes like a few days, because of his love for her. And Jacob said to Laban, "Give ***me*** my wife, for my days are completed, and let me go in to her." And Laban gathered all the men of the place, and he made a feast. And it came about in the evening, and he took Leah his daughter and brought her to him, and he went in to her. And Laban gave to her Zilpah his female servant, to Leah his daughter ***as*** a female servant. And it came about in the morning, and look, she ***was*** Leah. And he said to Laban, "What ***is*** this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? And why have you deceived me?" And Laban said, "It is not done so in our place, to give the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and let us give to you this one also, for the service that you will serve with me yet another seven years." And Jacob did so, and he completed the week of this one; and he gave him Rachel his daughter, to him for a wife. And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his female servant, to her for a female servant. And

he went in also to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah; and he served with him yet another seven years.

29:31-35 And the LORD saw that Leah ***was*** hated, and He opened her womb; and Rachel ***was*** barren. And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, "Because the LORD has looked on my affliction; for now my husband will love me." And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "Because the LORD has heard that I ***am*** hated, and He has given me this one also." And she called his name Simeon. And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "Now this time my husband will be joined to me, for I have borne to him three sons." Therefore he called his name Levi. And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah. And she ceased from bearing.

Chapter 29 Preview

Jacob arrives in the land of his mother's family and, at a well, meets Rachel, the daughter of his uncle Laban. It is love at first sight. Jacob agrees to work seven years for Rachel, and the years seem to him like only a few days. But on the wedding night, Laban gives him Leah, the older sister, instead. Jacob the deceiver has been deceived.

Jacob ends up with two wives and agrees to work seven more years for Rachel. He loves Rachel more than Leah, and the home is filled with sorrow and rivalry. Yet God sees the unloved wife. He opens Leah's womb, and she bears four sons. With the fourth, Judah, her heart turns from longing for her husband's love to simply praising the LORD. Through Judah would come King David, and in time Jesus Christ.

Chapter 29 Study

29:1-3 *And Jacob lifted up his feet and went to the land of the sons of the east. And he saw, and look, a well in the field, and look, three flocks of sheep* ***were*** *lying there beside it, for from that well they watered the flocks; and the stone on the mouth of the well* ***was*** *large. And all the flocks would be gathered there, and they would roll the stone from over the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and they would put the stone back over the mouth of the well, in its place.*

"Jacob lifted up his feet." That is, he set out again. After the vision at Bethel, there was a new spring in his step. He came to "the land of the sons of the east," the region east of Canaan, toward Mesopotamia.

He saw a well in a field with three flocks of sheep lying beside it. A large stone covered the mouth of the well. The local custom was to wait until all the flocks had gathered, and then roll the stone away together and water the sheep. The stone protected the precious water from dirt, from evaporation and from anyone who might take more than their share.

Wells play a big part in Genesis. Abraham's servant found Rebekah at a well (24:11). Moses will meet his wife at a well (Exodus 2:15-21). God was guiding Jacob's steps just as He had guided the servant years before.

29:4-8 *And Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where **are** you from?" And they said, "We **are** from Haran." And he said to them, "Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know **him**." And he said to them, "**Is there** peace for him?" And they said, "Peace. And look, Rachel his daughter **is** coming with the sheep." And he said, "Look, the day **is** still long; **it is** not the time for the livestock to be gathered. Water the sheep, and go, pasture **them**." And they said, "We are not able, until all the flocks are gathered, and they roll the stone from over the mouth of the well; and **then** we water the sheep."*

Jacob greeted the shepherds as "My brothers," and asked where they were from. "We are from Haran." It was exactly where he was headed. He asked about Laban, his mother's brother. They knew him, and they said, "look, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep."

Jacob, a man used to managing things, began giving advice right away. It was still the middle of the day. Why not water the sheep and send them back to the pasture? The shepherds explained that they couldn't. They had to wait until all the flocks were gathered. Jacob may simply have wanted the shepherds gone so he could meet Rachel alone.

29:9-12 *He **was** still speaking with them, and Rachel came with the sheep that **belonged** to her father, for she **was** a shepherdess. And it came about, when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, and Jacob drew near and rolled the stone from over the mouth of the well, and he watered the sheep of Laban his mother's brother. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and he lifted up his voice and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he **was** her father's brother, and that he **was** the son of Rebekah; and she ran and told her father.*

Rachel arrived with her father's sheep, "for she was a shepherdess." When Jacob saw her, he went straight to the well and rolled away the stone by himself, a stone that usually took several men to move. Then he watered her whole flock.

Jacob "kissed Rachel, and he lifted up his voice and wept." A kiss on the cheek was a normal greeting among relatives. But his tears showed how much this moment meant to him. He had traveled hundreds of miles alone, running from a brother who wanted to kill him. Now he stood with his own family, and God had led him right to them.

He told Rachel who he was, and she ran to tell her father. The scene is almost the same as when Rebekah ran home after meeting Abraham's servant (24:28).

29:13-14 *And it came about, when Laban heard the report of Jacob his sister's son, and he ran to meet him, and he embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. And he recounted to Laban all these things. And Laban said to him, "Surely you **are** my bone and my flesh." And he stayed with him a month of days.*

Laban "ran to meet him, and he embraced him and kissed him." The last time Laban ran out to meet a visitor from Canaan, his eye was on the gold (24:30). This time Jacob came with nothing. Laban welcomed him anyway, perhaps hoping there was more to come.

Jacob told Laban "all these things," likely the whole story of why he had come. Laban answered, "You are my bone and my flesh," which meant, you are family. Jacob stayed with him a month.

During that month, he was clearly working, and Laban was watching what a capable worker he had in his home.

29:15-20 *And Laban said to Jacob, "**Is it** because you **are** my brother that you should serve me for nothing? Tell me, what **will** your wages **be**?" And Laban had two daughters: the name of the older **was** Leah, and the name of the younger **was** Rachel. And the eyes of Leah **were** weak, and Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance. And Jacob loved Rachel, and he said, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter." And Laban said, "My giving her to you **is** better than my giving her to another man; stay with me." And Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they were in his eyes like a few days, because of his love for her.*

Laban asked what Jacob's wages should be. It sounded generous. But it also turned a nephew into an employee. From now on, the relationship between these two men would be about work and wages, and Laban would take advantage of Jacob for twenty years.

Moses introduces Laban's two daughters. Leah was the older, and "the eyes of Leah were weak." The Hebrew word can mean tender or soft, so it may mean her eyes lacked sparkle, or it may be a compliment. Either way, she was set in contrast to Rachel, who "was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance."

"Jacob loved Rachel." He offered to work seven years for her. In that culture a man paid a bride price to the bride's family. Jacob had no money, so he offered his labor. Laban agreed.

"Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they were in his eyes like a few days, because of his love for her." Love makes hard work light. When we love Christ, serving Him is not a burden. John says His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3).

29:21-25 *And Jacob said to Laban, "Give **me** my wife, for my days are completed, and let me go in to her." And Laban gathered all the men of the place, and he made a feast. And it came about in the evening, and he took Leah his daughter and brought her to him, and he went in to her. And Laban gave to her Zilpah his female servant, to Leah his daughter **as** a female servant. And it came about in the morning, and look, she **was** Leah. And he said to Laban, "What **is** this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? And why have you deceived me?"*

When the seven years were done, Jacob asked for his wife. Laban threw a wedding feast. "And it came about in the evening, and he took Leah his daughter and brought her to him." The bride would have been veiled, and it was dark. Jacob did not know it was Leah until morning.

In the morning, "look, she was Leah." Jacob was furious: "What is this you have done to me?" He asked, "Why have you deceived me?"

Jacob was asking the very question Esau and Isaac could have asked him. He had deceived his blind father in his brother's clothes. Now he was deceived in the dark by a woman in her sister's veil. Jacob had pretended to be the firstborn. Now the firstborn was passed off as the younger. God was not mocked. Jacob was reaping what he had sown (Galatians 6:7). God did not cause Laban's sin, but He used it to begin teaching Jacob what it feels like to be on the other side of a lie.

Leah's part in this is not described. She likely had little choice. Her father arranged everything. But she must have known what was happening, and it began a marriage in which she would always feel second.

29:26-30 *And Laban said, "It is not done so in our place, to give the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and let us give to you this one also, for the service that you will serve with me yet another seven years." And Jacob did so, and he completed the week of this one; and he gave him Rachel his daughter, to him for a wife. And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his female servant, to her for a female servant. And he went in also to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah; and he served with him yet another seven years.*

Laban had his excuse ready: "It is not done so in our place, to give the younger before the firstborn." There was a sting in those words. Jacob, the younger, had taken the place of the firstborn back home. Laban may not have known that, but God did.

Laban offered a deal. Complete Leah's wedding week, the seven days of celebration, and then Jacob could marry Rachel too, in exchange for seven more years of work. Jacob agreed. A week later he married Rachel, and he worked another seven years.

Each daughter received a maid, Zilpah for Leah and Bilhah for Rachel. Their names will matter in the next chapter.

"He also loved Rachel more than Leah." Jacob now had two wives, two sisters and a home filled with rivalry. God's pattern from the beginning was one man and one woman (2:24; Matthew 19:4-6). Later the Law of Moses would forbid a man from marrying his wife's sister while she was alive, as a rival to her (Leviticus 18:18). Jacob's household shows why. Favoritism, which had already done so much damage in Isaac's family, was now built into Jacob's marriage.

29:31-32 *And the LORD saw that Leah **was** hated, and He opened her womb; and Rachel **was** barren. And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, "Because the LORD has looked on my affliction; for now my husband will love me."*

"The LORD saw that Leah was hated." That is the Hebrew word, but in this setting it means she was loved less (29:30). God saw her pain. And "He opened her womb; and Rachel was barren." The wife her husband loved less was the wife God blessed with children.

Leah named her first son Reuben. The name sounds like the Hebrew for see, a son, and also like the words for He has seen my misery. She said, "Because the LORD has looked on my affliction; for now my husband will love me." Leah knew God saw her. But her heart was still set on winning Jacob's love.

God sees the lonely and the overlooked. Like Hagar, who called Him "a God of seeing" (16:13), Leah found that God noticed her when her husband did not. If you feel unloved or unwanted, the LORD sees you.

29:33-35 *And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "Because the LORD has heard that I **am** hated, and He has given me this one also." And she called his name Simeon. And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "Now this time my husband will be joined to me, for I have borne to him three sons." Therefore he called his name Levi. And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah. And she ceased from bearing.*

Leah's second son was Simeon. The name is related to the Hebrew word for "hear." She said, "the LORD has heard that I am hated." Her third son was Levi, which sounds like "attached." She said, "Now this time my husband will be joined to me." Three sons, and still she was hoping her husband would finally love her.

Then came the fourth son, and something changed. "This time I will praise the LORD." She named him Judah, which is related to the Hebrew word for "praise." For the first time, Leah did not mention her husband. Her eyes moved from what she lacked to the God who had given her so much.

We can spend years trying to get from people what only God can give. It was not wrong for Leah to want her husband's love. But she learned that her worth did not depend on it, and she found peace when she turned to praise.

And God honored Leah far beyond what she could have known. From Levi came Moses, Aaron and the priests of Israel. From Judah came King David, and from David's line came Jesus Christ, "the Lion who is of the tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5). Rachel was the beloved wife, but the line of the Messiah came through Leah, the unloved one. God delights to lift up the lowly.

Chapter 29 Summary

Jacob arrived near Haran and met Rachel at a well, rolled the stone away, watered her flock and wept for joy. Laban welcomed him, and Jacob agreed to serve seven years for Rachel, years that seemed like a few days because of his love. On the wedding night Laban gave him Leah instead, and Jacob the deceiver was deceived. Laban gave him Rachel a week later in return for seven more years of work. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, but the LORD saw Leah's pain and gave her four sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. With Judah, Leah turned from longing for her husband's love to praising the LORD, and through Judah would come David and, in time, Jesus Christ.

People and Places

- Rachel: Laban's younger daughter, the wife Jacob loved.
- Leah: Laban's older daughter, Jacob's first wife.
- Zilpah: Leah's maid.
- Bilhah: Rachel's maid.

Chapter 29 Study Questions

1. Where did Jacob meet Rachel, and what did he do for her? (29:9-11)

2. Laban ran to meet Jacob, just as he had run to Abraham's servant (24:29-30; 29:13). What do you make of his warm welcome?

3. What did Jacob offer to do to marry Rachel? (29:18)

4. Jacob's seven years "were in his eyes like a few days" (29:20). How does love change the way we feel about hard work, including serving Christ?

5. How did Laban deceive Jacob, and what excuse did he give? (29:23-26)

6. How was Jacob's experience with Laban like what he had done to his father and brother? (27:19; 29:25)

7. What did the LORD see about Leah, and what did He do? (29:31)

8. What did Leah say when Judah was born, and how was this different from her earlier words? (29:32-35)

9. Leah kept hoping that the next son would win her husband's love. Where are you looking to people for what only God can give?

10. God saw the unloved wife and brought the Messiah through her line. How does this encourage someone who feels overlooked?

Chapter 30: Jacob's Children and Flocks

Scripture

30:1-13 And Rachel saw that she had not borne ***children*** to Jacob, and Rachel was jealous of her sister, and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, and if not, I ***am*** dying." And the anger of Jacob burned against Rachel, and he said, "***Am*** I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" And she said, "Look, my maidservant Bilhah; go in to her, and let her bear on my knees, and let me also be built up from her." And she gave him Bilhah her female servant for a wife, and Jacob went in to her. And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. And Rachel said, "God has judged me, and He has also listened to my voice and has given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan. And she conceived again, and Bilhah, the female servant of Rachel, bore a second son to Jacob. And Rachel said, "***With*** wrestlings of God I have wrestled with my sister; also I have prevailed." And she called his name Naphtali. And Leah saw that she had ceased from bearing, and she took Zilpah her female servant and gave her to Jacob for a wife. And Zilpah, the female servant of Leah, bore Jacob a son. And Leah said, "Good fortune has come!" And she called his name Gad. And Zilpah, the female servant of Leah, bore a second son to Jacob. And Leah said, "In my happiness! For daughters will call me happy." And she called his name Asher.

30:14-24 And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and he found mandrakes in the field and brought them to Leah his mother. And Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of the mandrakes of your son." And she said to her, "***Is*** your taking my husband a small ***thing***, and ***now you would*** take also the mandrakes of my son?" And Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight in exchange for the mandrakes of your son." And Jacob came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him and said, "You will come in to me, for I have surely hired you with the mandrakes of my son." And he lay with her that night. And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore to Jacob a fifth son. And Leah said, "God has given ***me*** my wages, because I gave my female servant to my husband." And she called his name Issachar. And Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob. And Leah said, "God has endowed me ***with*** a good endowment; this time my husband will honor me, for I have borne him six sons." And she called his name Zebulun. And afterward she bore a daughter, and she called her name Dinah. And God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. And she conceived and bore a son, and she said, "God has taken away my reproach." And she called his name Joseph, saying, "May the LORD add to me another son."

30:25-43 And it came about, when Rachel had borne Joseph, and Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, and let me go to my place and to my land. Give ***me*** my wives and my children, for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you, you know my service with which I have served you." And Laban said to him, "If, please, I have found favor in your eyes—I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me on account of you." And he said, "Name your wages to me, and let me give ***it***." And he said to him, "You, you know how I have served you, and how your livestock has been with me. For the little that you had before me has increased to abundance, and the LORD has blessed you at my foot. And now, when shall I also provide for my house?" And he said, "What shall I give you?" And Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this thing for me, I will again pasture your flock ***and*** keep ***it***. Let me pass through all your flock today, removing

from there every speckled and spotted one of the flock, and every dark one of the flock among the lambs, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and ***these*** shall be my wages. And my righteousness will answer for me on a day to come, when you come concerning my wages before you: every one that ***is*** not speckled and spotted among the goats and dark among the lambs, it ***is*** stolen with me." And Laban said, "Look, if only it may be according to your word." And on that day he removed the male goats that ***were*** striped and spotted, and all the female goats that ***were*** speckled and spotted, every one on which ***there was*** white, and every dark one among the lambs, and he gave ***them*** into the hand of his sons. And he set a journey of three days between himself and Jacob; and Jacob ***was*** pasturing the rest of the flock of Laban. And Jacob took for himself branches of fresh poplar and almond and plane tree, and he peeled white streaks in them, laying bare the white that ***was*** on the branches. And he set the branches that he had peeled in the troughs, in the watering channels of the water, where the flock came to drink, in front of the flock; and they mated when they came to drink. And the flock mated at the branches, and the flock bore striped, speckled, and spotted ***ones***. And Jacob separated the lambs, and he set the faces of the flock toward the striped and every dark one in the flock of Laban; and he made droves for himself alone, and he did not put them with the flock of Laban. And it would be, whenever the vigorous ***ones*** of the flock were in heat, and Jacob would put the branches before the eyes of the flock in the troughs, for them to mate at the branches. And when the flock was feeble, he would not put ***them***; and the feeble were Laban's, and the vigorous Jacob's. And the man increased very, very ***much***, and he had many flocks, and female servants and ***male*** servants, and camels and donkeys.

Chapter 30 Preview

Chapter 30 reads like a contest between two sisters, and in a sense it is. Rachel is loved but has no children. Leah has children but is not loved. Each sister gives her maid to Jacob as a wife, and the names of the babies tell the story of their rivalry: "I have wrestled with my sister; also I have prevailed," "Good fortune has come!" "God has given me my wages, because I gave my female servant to my husband." Even a handful of mandrakes becomes a bargaining chip. Yet out of this jealous, unhappy home, God builds the family that will become the twelve tribes of Israel. At last God remembers Rachel, and she gives birth to Joseph.

In the second half, Jacob asks to go home, but Laban wants to keep him because God has blessed Laban for Jacob's sake. They strike a deal over speckled and spotted animals. Laban tries to cheat Jacob again, and Jacob uses peeled rods and careful breeding to build his flocks. By the end, Jacob is very prosperous. As the next chapter will show, it was God, not Jacob's methods, who made the difference.

Chapter 30 Study

30:1-2 *And Rachel saw that she had not borne **children** to Jacob, and Rachel was jealous of her sister, and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, and if not, I **am** dying." And the anger of Jacob burned against Rachel, and he said, "**Am** I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"*

Rachel "was jealous of her sister" when she "saw that she had not borne children to Jacob." Rachel had her husband's love, but Leah had four sons. Each sister wanted what the other had. Jealousy is never satisfied.

Rachel's demand was desperate: "Give me children, and if not, I am dying." In that culture, being unable to have children was seen as a deep shame for a woman. Rachel's pain was real. But she turned it on her husband instead of taking it to God.

Jacob's response was angry and sharp: "Am I in the place of God?" He was right that only God gives children. But he spoke without compassion. Isaac had prayed for Rebekah when she was barren (25:21). We are not told that Jacob prayed for Rachel at this point. When someone we love is hurting, the better response is to pray with them and for them, not to lash out.

30:3-8 *And she said, "Look, my maidservant Bilhah; go in to her, and let her bear on my knees, and let me also be built up from her." And she gave him Bilhah her female servant for a wife, and Jacob went in to her. And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. And Rachel said, "God has judged me, and He has also listened to my voice and has given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan. And she conceived again, and Bilhah, the female servant of Rachel, bore a second son to Jacob. And Rachel said, "**With** wrestlings of God I have wrestled with my sister; also I have prevailed." And she called his name Naphtali.*

Rachel took the same path Sarah had taken with Hagar (16:2). She gave her maid Bilhah to Jacob "as a wife" so that Bilhah could "bear on my knees," a picture of Rachel receiving the baby as her own child. Some ancient law codes and marriage contracts, such as the Laws of Hammurabi and tablets from Nuzi, mention a similar practice: a childless wife could give her servant to her husband, and the children could be counted as the wife's own.

It may have been accepted practice, but it was not God's way. It had brought nothing but grief to Abraham's home, and it brought more rivalry to Jacob's.

Bilhah bore a son, and Rachel named him Dan, which means "judge" or "vindicate." She said, "God has judged me." Bilhah bore a second son, and Rachel named him Naphtali, from the word for wrestling. "With wrestlings of God I have wrestled with my sister; also I have prevailed." Rachel saw her family as a contest, and she claimed she was winning.

30:9-13 *And Leah saw that she had ceased from bearing, and she took Zilpah her female servant and gave her to Jacob for a wife. And Zilpah, the female servant of Leah, bore Jacob a son. And Leah said, "Good fortune has come!" And she called his name Gad. And Zilpah, the female servant of Leah, bore a second son to Jacob. And Leah said, "In my happiness! For daughters will call me happy." And she called his name Asher.*

Leah had stopped having children for a while (29:35). Not to be outdone, she gave her own maid Zilpah to Jacob as a wife. The rivalry was now pulling four women and one man into a tangled household.

Zilpah bore a son, and Leah said, "Good fortune has come!" She named him Gad, which means good fortune. Zilpah bore another son, and Leah said, "In my happiness!" She named him Asher, which means "happy."

Leah sounds glad, but we should not miss how sad this whole scene is. Children were being named as trophies in a war between sisters. The names say more about the mothers' hearts than the babies. Even so, each of these boys would become the head of a tribe in Israel. God was building His nation out of very imperfect people.

30:14-16 *And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and he found mandrakes in the field and brought them to Leah his mother. And Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of the mandrakes of your son." And she said to her, "**Is** your taking my husband a small **thing**, and **now you would** take also the mandrakes of my son?" And Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight in exchange for the mandrakes of your son." And Jacob came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him and said, "You will come in to me, for I have surely hired you with the mandrakes of my son." And he lay with her that night.*

During the wheat harvest, Leah's oldest son Reuben found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother. The mandrake is a plant with a strong smell and a root that can look a little like a human figure. In the ancient world, many people believed mandrakes could help a woman become pregnant. The Hebrew name is related to the word for "love."

Rachel asked for some. Leah's bitter reply showed how deep the wound went: "Is your taking my husband a small thing?" Rachel offered a trade. Leah could have Jacob for the night in exchange for the mandrakes. When Jacob came in from the field, Leah met him and said, "I have surely hired you with the mandrakes of my son."

It is a sad picture. The wives were bargaining over their husband, and Jacob just went along. He had married two sisters, and now he was living with the results.

30:17-21 *And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore to Jacob a fifth son. And Leah said, "God has given **me** my wages, because I gave my female servant to my husband." And she called his name Issachar. And Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob. And Leah said, "God has endowed me **with** a good endowment; this time my husband will honor me, for I have borne him six sons." And she called his name Zebulun. And afterward she bore a daughter, and she called her name Dinah.*

"God listened to Leah." That suggests that Leah had been praying. She conceived and bore a fifth son. Rachel had the mandrakes, but Leah had the baby. Children come from God, not from superstitions or charms.

Leah named him Issachar, which sounds like the word for "wages" or "hire." She said, "God has given me my wages, because I gave my female servant to my husband." Leah believed God was rewarding her for giving Zilpah to Jacob. Genesis doesn't say God saw it that way. Leah was reading her own meaning into God's kindness.

Then came a sixth son, Zebulun, which is related to the words for "gift" and "dwell" or "honor." "This time my husband will honor me." Even after six sons, Leah still longed for her husband's love. Some wounds run deep.

Leah also bore a daughter, Dinah. She is the only daughter of Jacob whose birth is recorded, and we will meet her again in chapter 34.

30:22-24 *And God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. And she conceived and bore a son, and she said, "God has taken away my reproach." And she called his name Joseph, saying, "May the LORD add to me another son."*

"And God remembered Rachel." When the Bible says God remembered someone, it doesn't mean He had forgotten them. It means He acted on their behalf at the right time. God remembered Noah in the ark (8:1). Now He remembered Rachel. "And God listened to her and opened her womb."

Rachel's son was born only when God opened her womb. Not the mandrakes, not the maid, not her husband and not her schemes. God did it, in His time.

Rachel said, "God has taken away my reproach." Then she named him Joseph, which means may He add. She prayed, "May the LORD add to me another son." God would answer that prayer too, with Benjamin (35:16-18), though it would cost Rachel her life.

Joseph will become the main figure in the last part of Genesis. Out of this home of rivalry and pain, God brought the son through whom He would save the whole family from famine.

30:25-28 *And it came about, when Rachel had borne Joseph, and Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, and let me go to my place and to my land. Give **me** my wives and my children, for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you, you know my service with which I have served you." And Laban said to him, "If, please, I have found favor in your eyes—I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me on account of you." And he said, "Name your wages to me, and let me give **it**."*

After Joseph was born, Jacob asked to go home. "Send me away, and let me go to my place and to my land." Fourteen years of service for his wives were done. He wanted to go back to Canaan, the land of promise.

Laban did not want to lose him. "I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me on account of you." To divine is to try to learn secret things through pagan practices such as reading omens. God would later forbid it (Deuteronomy 18:10). Laban was not a worshiper of the LORD alone, and we will see his household gods in the next chapter (31:19). Yet even Laban could tell that God's blessing was on Jacob. It was a small fulfillment of God's promise that those who bless Abraham's family would be blessed (12:3).

"Name your wages to me, and let me give it." Laban knew how to sound generous. Jacob had learned not to trust him.

30:29-34 *And he said to him, "You, you know how I have served you, and how your livestock has been with me. For the little that you had before me has increased to abundance, and the LORD has blessed you at my foot. And now, when shall I also provide for my house?" And he said, "What shall I give you?" And Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this thing for me, I will again pasture your flock **and** keep **it**. Let me pass through all your flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted one of the flock, and every dark one of the flock among the lambs, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and **these** shall be my wages. And my righteousness will answer for me on a day to come, when you come concerning my wages before you: every one that **is** not speckled and spotted among the goats and dark among the lambs, it **is** stolen with me." And Laban said, "Look, if only it may be according to your word."*

Jacob reminded Laban of the facts. "The little that you had before me has increased to abundance," and "the LORD has blessed you at my foot." But Jacob had nothing of his own: "when shall I also provide for my house?" A man who loves his family wants to provide for them (1 Timothy 5:8).

Jacob asked for no wages up front. Instead he proposed a deal. In that region, sheep were usually white and goats were usually dark brown or black. Jacob would take only the unusual animals: the speckled and spotted goats, and the black sheep. Those would be his pay. Any animal of the normal colors found in his flock could be counted as stolen. "My righteousness will answer for me."

It looked like a very good deal for Laban, since unusual animals were few. Laban said, "if only it may be according to your word."

30:35-36 *And on that day he removed the male goats that **were** striped and spotted, and all the female goats that **were** speckled and spotted, every one on which **there was** white, and every dark one among the lambs, and he gave **them** into the hand of his sons. And he set a journey of three days between himself and Jacob; and Jacob **was** pasturing the rest of the flock of Laban.*

That same day, Laban moved quickly. He removed all the speckled, spotted and striped goats and all the black sheep from the flocks, and handed them over to his own sons. Then he put three days' journey between them and Jacob.

In other words, Laban took away the very animals Jacob was supposed to start with. Jacob was left tending only the solid-colored flocks, with almost no chance of getting the spotted ones he had been promised. Laban was cheating Jacob again. Later Jacob will say Laban changed his wages ten times (31:7).

30:37-43 *And Jacob took for himself branches of fresh poplar and almond and plane tree, and he peeled white streaks in them, laying bare the white that **was** on the branches. And he set the branches that he had peeled in the troughs, in the watering channels of the water, where the flock came to drink, in front of the flock; and they mated when they came to drink. And the flock mated at the branches, and the flock bore striped, speckled, and spotted **ones**. And Jacob separated the lambs, and he set the faces of the flock toward the striped and every dark one in the flock of Laban; and he made droves for himself alone, and he did not put them with the flock of Laban. And it would be, whenever the vigorous **ones** of the flock were in heat, and Jacob would put the branches before the eyes of the flock in the troughs, for them to mate at the branches. And when the flock was feeble, he would not put **them**; and the feeble were Laban's, and the vigorous Jacob's. And the man increased very, very **much**, and he had many flocks, and female servants and **male** servants, and camels and donkeys.*

Jacob took fresh branches from poplar, almond and plane trees, and peeled white stripes in them. He set them in the watering troughs where the flocks mated. Many people in the ancient world believed that what an animal saw while mating could affect the look of its young. The flocks gave birth to striped, speckled and spotted animals. Jacob also bred the stronger animals for his own flock and left the weaker ones for Laban.

Did the peeled rods really work? Science would say no. In the next chapter, Jacob himself explains what really happened. God showed him in a dream that He was the one causing the spotted animals to be born, because He had seen what Laban was doing (31:10-12). The rods were Jacob's idea. The blessing was God's doing. Jacob also seems to have been a skilled breeder who knew how to choose the strongest animals, and God blessed that work.

"And the man increased very, very much." Jacob had arrived with nothing but a staff. Now he had large flocks, servants, camels and donkeys. God had promised at Bethel to be with him and keep him (28:15), and He kept His word, even while Jacob was still a schemer at heart. The lesson for us is not to trust in clever methods. Work hard and work honestly, but remember that "the blessing of the LORD" is what truly makes rich (Proverbs 10:22).

Chapter 30 Summary

Rachel, jealous of Leah's sons, demanded children from Jacob and then gave him her maid Bilhah, who bore Dan and Naphtali. Leah gave Jacob her maid Zilpah, who bore Gad and Asher. Rachel traded a night with Jacob for Reuben's mandrakes, but it was Leah whom God heard, and she bore Issachar and Zebulun, and a daughter, Dinah. Then God remembered Rachel and opened her womb, and she bore Joseph, praying for another son. Jacob asked to return home, but Laban, who saw that God had blessed him because of Jacob, wanted him to stay. They agreed that Jacob's wages would be the speckled and spotted animals. Laban tried to cheat him by removing those animals, but Jacob's flocks multiplied, and he became very prosperous, because God was with him.

People and Places

- Dan, Naphtali: Jacob's sons by Bilhah, Rachel's maid.
- Gad, Asher: Jacob's sons by Zilpah, Leah's maid.
- Issachar, Zebulun: Leah's fifth and sixth sons.
- Dinah: Leah's daughter.
- Joseph: Rachel's first son, whose story fills the end of Genesis.
- Mandrakes: a plant many in the ancient world believed helped a woman conceive.

Chapter 30 Study Questions

1. Why was Rachel jealous of Leah, and what did she demand of Jacob? (30:1)

2. How did Jacob respond to Rachel, and what was right and wrong about his answer? (30:2)

3. What did Rachel and Leah each do with their maids? (30:3-4, 9)

4. Rachel had the mandrakes, but Leah had the baby (30:14-17). What does that say about where children and blessings come from?

5. What did God do for Rachel, and what did she name her son? (30:22-24)

6. Even Laban could see that God was blessing him because of Jacob (30:27). How might God bless others through us, even people who do not know Him?

7. What wages did Jacob ask for, and how did Laban try to cheat him? (30:32-36)

8. According to 30:37-43 (and 31:10-12), who was really responsible for Jacob's growing flocks?

9. The names of these children show the rivalry between two sisters. Is there a rivalry or jealousy in your life that you need to bring to God?

10. Jacob's methods were clever, but it was God who blessed him. Where are you tempted to trust your own methods more than the Lord?

Chapter 31: Jacob Flees from Laban

Scripture

31:1-21 And he heard the words of the sons of Laban, saying, "Jacob has taken all that ***belonged*** to our father, and from what ***belonged*** to our father he has made all these riches." And Jacob saw the face of Laban, and look, it ***was*** not toward him as before. And the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you." And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock. And he said to them, "I see the face of your father, that it ***is*** not toward me as before; and the God of my father has been with me. And you, you know that with all my strength I have served your father. And your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times; and God has not allowed him to do harm to me. If he said thus, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' and all the flock bore speckled; and if he said thus, 'The striped shall be your wages,' and all the flock bore striped. And God has taken away the livestock of your father and given ***it*** to me. And it came about at the time the flock mated, and I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream, and look, the male goats that were going up on the flock ***were*** striped, speckled, and mottled. And the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Please lift up your eyes and see: all the male goats that are going up on the flock ***are*** striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I ***am*** the God ***of*** Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you vowed a vow to Me. Now arise, go out from this land, and return to the land of your kindred.'" And Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "***Is there*** still a portion and an inheritance for us in the house of our father? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has also completely consumed our money. For all the wealth that God has taken away from our father, it ***belongs*** to us and to our children. And now, all that God has said to you, do." And Jacob arose, and he lifted his children and his wives onto the camels. And he drove away all his livestock and all his possessions that he had gathered, the livestock of his acquiring, which he had gathered in Paddan-aram, to go to Isaac his father, to the land of Canaan. And Laban had gone to shear his flock, and Rachel stole the teraphim that ***belonged*** to her father. And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean, in that he did not tell him that he ***was*** fleeing. And he fled, he and all that ***belonged*** to him; and he arose and crossed the River, and he set his face ***toward*** the hill country of Gilead.

31:22-42 And it was told to Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled. And he took his brothers with him, and he pursued after him a journey of seven days, and he overtook him in the hill country of Gilead. And God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night, and He said to him, "Guard yourself, lest you speak with Jacob from good to bad." And Laban overtook Jacob. And Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban pitched ***his tent*** with his brothers in the hill country of Gilead. And Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done, that you have deceived me and have led away my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you hide yourself to flee, and deceive me, and not tell me? And I would have sent you away with gladness and with songs, with tambourine and with lyre. And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now you have acted foolishly in doing ***so***. It is in the power of my hand to do harm to you; and the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Guard yourself from speaking with Jacob from good to bad.' And now, you have surely gone, because you have surely longed for the house of your father;

why did you steal my gods?" And Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I said, 'Lest you tear away your daughters from me.' With whomever you find your gods, he shall not live. Before our brothers, examine for yourself what ***is*** with me, and take ***it*** for yourself." And Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. And Laban went into the tent of Jacob and into the tent of Leah and into the tent of the two maidservants, and he did not find ***them***. And he came out from the tent of Leah and went into the tent of Rachel. And Rachel had taken the teraphim and put them in the saddle of the camel, and she sat on them. And Laban felt through all the tent, and he did not find ***them***. And she said to her father, "Let it not burn ***with anger*** in the eyes of my lord that I am not able to rise before you, for the way of women ***is*** on me." And he searched, and he did not find the teraphim. And Jacob burned ***with anger***, and he contended with Laban; and Jacob answered and said to Laban, "What ***is*** my transgression? What ***is*** my sin, that you have hotly pursued after me? For you have felt through all my goods; what have you found of all the goods of your house? Set ***it*** here before my brothers and your brothers, and let them decide between the two of us. These twenty years I ***have been*** with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and the rams of your flock I have not eaten. The torn I did not bring to you; I, I bore the loss of it; from my hand you required it, stolen by day and stolen by night. ***Thus*** I was: in the day the heat consumed me, and the frost in the night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. These ***have been*** for me twenty years in your house: I served you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flock, and you changed my wages ten times. If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been for me, surely now you would have sent me away empty. My affliction and the toil of my hands God has seen, and He decided last night."

31:43-55 And Laban answered and said to Jacob, "The daughters ***are*** my daughters, and the sons ***are*** my sons, and the flock ***is*** my flock, and all that you see, it ***is*** mine. And to my daughters, what can I do to these today, or to their sons whom they have borne? And now come, let us cut a covenant, I and you, and it shall be for a witness between me and you." And Jacob took a stone and raised it up ***as*** a pillar. And Jacob said to his brothers, "Gather stones." And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. And Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, and Jacob called it Galeed. And Laban said, "This heap ***is*** a witness between me and you today." Therefore he called its name Galeed, and Mizpah, for he said, "May the LORD watch between me and you when we are hidden each from his neighbor. If you mistreat my daughters, and if you take wives besides my daughters, ***though*** no man ***is*** with us, see, God ***is*** a witness between me and you." And Laban said to Jacob, "Look, this heap, and look, the pillar that I have set up between me and you. This heap ***is*** a witness, and the pillar ***is*** a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and that you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor judge between us, the God of their father." And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. And Jacob sacrificed a sacrifice in the hill country, and he called his brothers to eat bread; and they ate bread and lodged in the hill country. And Laban rose early in the morning, and he kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them. And Laban went and returned to his place.

Chapter 31 Preview

Jacob has lived with his uncle Laban for twenty years. He came with nothing but a staff. Now he has two wives, two maids, eleven sons, a daughter and large flocks. But the mood in Laban's house has turned sour, and God speaks: it is time to go home. Jacob gathers his family and slips away while Laban is busy shearing sheep. Rachel takes something with her that does not belong to her.

Laban chases them for seven days and catches them in the hill country of Gilead. God warns Laban in a dream not to harm Jacob. The two men argue, Jacob pours out twenty years of hurt, and in the end they set up a heap of stones and make a covenant of peace. Through it all, God keeps the promise He made at Bethel: "I will be with you."

Chapter 31 Study

31:1-3 *And he heard the words of the sons of Laban, saying, "Jacob has taken all that **belonged** to our father, and from what **belonged** to our father he has made all these riches." And Jacob saw the face of Laban, and look, it **was** not toward him as before. And the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you."*

Jacob's wealth had grown, and Laban's sons resented it. They said Jacob had taken "all that belonged to our father." That was not true. Laban had cheated Jacob for years, and God had blessed Jacob in spite of it (30:43). Jealousy rarely tells the whole story.

Laban's face told Jacob the rest. Jacob saw Laban's face, "and look, it was not toward him as before." When a place turns cold, it is not always a sign to leave. This time, though, God spoke plainly: "Return to the land of your fathers." The LORD added the same promise He gave at Bethel twenty years before (28:15): "I will be with you."

God often uses hard circumstances to move us, but He does not leave us to guess from circumstances alone. Jacob moved because God told him to.

31:4-9 *And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock. And he said to them, "I see the face of your father, that it **is** not toward me as before; and the God of my father has been with me. And you, you know that with all my strength I have served your father. And your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times; and God has not allowed him to do harm to me. If he said thus, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' and all the flock bore speckled; and if he said thus, 'The striped shall be your wages,' and all the flock bore striped. And God has taken away the livestock of your father and given **it** to me.*

Jacob called Rachel and Leah out to the field, probably so Laban's household would not overhear. He laid out his case. He had served their father "with all my strength." Laban had cheated him and changed his wages "ten times." That may be a round number meaning over and over, but either way it describes a man who kept moving the line.

Jacob gives God the credit for his success: "God has not allowed him to do harm to me," and "God has taken away the livestock of your father and given it to me." In chapter 30 Jacob used peeled

branches at the watering troughs, and it may have looked like his own cleverness made the flocks grow. Here Jacob admits the truth. It was God all along.

That is a mark of growth. The young Jacob trusted his own schemes. The older Jacob is learning that blessing comes from the Lord.

31:10-13 *And it came about at the time the flock mated, and I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream, and look, the male goats that were going up on the flock **were** striped, speckled, and mottled. And the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Please lift up your eyes and see: all the male goats that are going up on the flock **are** striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I **am** the God **of** Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you vowed a vow to Me. Now arise, go out from this land, and return to the land of your kindred.'"*

Jacob tells his wives about a dream he had at mating time. In it he saw the male goats were "striped, speckled, and mottled." This explains chapter 30. The breeding came out in Jacob's favor because God was watching, not because of the branches.

"The angel of God" spoke in the dream, and then He said, "I am the God of Bethel." The angel calls Himself God and reminds Jacob of the pillar he anointed and the vow he made (28:18-22). He speaks the way the angel of the LORD spoke to Hagar, and many believe He was the Son of God (see chapter 16).

God had "seen all that Laban is doing." Jacob had felt alone and used. He was not alone. God sees every wrong done to His people, even when no one else does.

31:14-16 *And Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "**Is there** still a portion and an inheritance for us in the house of our father? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has also completely consumed our money. For all the wealth that God has taken away from our father, it **belongs** to us and to our children. And now, all that God has said to you, do."*

Rachel and Leah agreed at once. For two sisters who had fought for years (30:1-15), this is one of the few times they speak with one voice. What brought them together was their father's greed.

They asked, "Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us." Jacob had paid the bride price for them with fourteen years of work (29:18, 27). Their words in verse 15 suggest they expected some of that value to come to them as security for their future, but Laban kept all of it. The daughters felt they had been traded for profit.

"And now, all that God has said to you, do." Whatever their motives, that is good advice in any home.

31:17-21 *And Jacob arose, and he lifted his children and his wives onto the camels. And he drove away all his livestock and all his possessions that he had gathered, the livestock of his acquiring, which he had gathered in Paddan-aram, to go to Isaac his father, to the land of Canaan. And Laban had gone to shear his flock, and Rachel stole the teraphim that* ***belonged*** *to her father. And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean, in that he did not tell him that he* ***was*** *fleeing. And he fled, he and all that* ***belonged*** *to him; and he arose and crossed the River, and he set his face* ***toward*** *the hill country of Gilead.*

Jacob packed up everything he had gathered in Paddan-aram and headed for Canaan "to Isaac his father." Isaac was still alive, and Jacob had not seen him in twenty years.

Two people deceived Laban that day. Rachel "stole the teraphim that belonged to her father." Teraphim were images of household gods. Many were small, though one in David's day was large enough to pass for a man in bed (1 Samuel 19:13). We aren't told why she took them. She may have still trusted them for protection. Some older books suggested that holding the family gods could support a claim to the inheritance, but many scholars now doubt that. Either way, she should not have taken them. Rachel had married into the family of the true God, but she still had a foot in her father's religion.

Jacob also "deceived Laban" by leaving in secret. In Hebrew the phrase is that he stole Laban's heart, the same word used for Rachel's theft. Jacob was obeying God by leaving, but he chose a sneaky way to do it. Old habits die hard. He crossed the Euphrates, the great river, and headed for the hill country of Gilead, east of the Jordan.

31:22-25 *And it was told to Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled. And he took his brothers with him, and he pursued after him a journey of seven days, and he overtook him in the hill country of Gilead. And God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night, and He said to him, "Guard yourself, lest you speak with Jacob from good to bad." And Laban overtook Jacob. And Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban pitched* ***his tent*** *with his brothers in the hill country of Gilead.*

Laban heard on the third day and set out with his relatives. He "pursued after him a journey of seven days," a long chase. Laban was not coming to wave goodbye. He was coming to get back what he thought was his.

Then God stepped in. He came to "Laban the Aramean in a dream" and warned him not to speak "with Jacob from good to bad." It is a Hebrew way of saying he must not try anything at all. Laban could talk, but he could not harm Jacob or force him to come back.

God protected Jacob even though Jacob had fled in a less than honest way. God's protection is a gift of His grace, not a reward for perfect behavior. That should humble us and comfort us at the same time.

31:26-30 *And Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done, that you have deceived me and have led away my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you hide yourself to flee, and deceive me, and not tell me? And I would have sent you away with gladness and with songs, with tambourine and with lyre. And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now you have acted foolishly in doing* ***so****. It is in the power of my hand to do harm to you; and the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Guard yourself from speaking with Jacob from good to bad.' And now, you have surely gone, because you have surely longed for the house of your father; why did you steal my gods?"*

Laban played the hurt father. Jacob had carried off his daughters "like captives of the sword." He claimed he would have sent them away "with gladness and with songs, with tambourine and with lyre." That is hard to believe from a man who had cheated Jacob for twenty years.

Then Laban admitted the truth: "It is in the power of my hand to do harm to you." He had the men and the will to do it. But "the God of your father spoke to me last night." Laban knew whose hand was on Jacob.

His last question was the one that really bothered him: "why did you steal my gods?" There is something sad in that question. A god that can be stolen and carried off on a camel is no god at all. The God of Jacob had just stopped Laban in his tracks. Laban's gods could not even keep themselves at home.

31:31-35 *And Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I said, 'Lest you tear away your daughters from me.' With whomever you find your gods, he shall not live. Before our brothers, examine for yourself what* ***is*** *with me, and take* ***it*** *for yourself." And Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. And Laban went into the tent of Jacob and into the tent of Leah and into the tent of the two maidservants, and he did not find* ***them****. And he came out from the tent of Leah and went into the tent of Rachel. And Rachel had taken the teraphim and put them in the saddle of the camel, and she sat on them. And Laban felt through all the tent, and he did not find* ***them****. And she said to her father, "Let it not burn* ***with anger*** *in the eyes of my lord that I am not able to rise before you, for the way of women* ***is*** *on me." And he searched, and he did not find the teraphim.*

Jacob answered honestly about his fear. He had said to himself, "Lest you tear away your daughters from me." Then he made a rash promise: "With whomever you find your gods, he shall not live." Jacob did not know Rachel had taken them. His words put the wife he loved most in real danger.

Laban searched tent after tent. Rachel had hidden the idols "in the saddle of the camel" and sat on them. She told her father she could not stand up because "the way of women is on me." Laban did not search any further.

There is irony here. Laban's precious gods spent the search hidden under a woman who said she was having her period. The Law later treats that time as ceremonially unclean, meaning a woman was not to take part in worship for a time (Leviticus 15:19-20). It was about ritual, not about sin or

worth. The story is mocking idols. That does not make Rachel's lie right. Deception ran deep in this family, from Rebekah to Jacob to Laban to Rachel.

31:36-42 *And Jacob burned **with anger**, and he contended with Laban; and Jacob answered and said to Laban, "What **is** my transgression? What **is** my sin, that you have hotly pursued after me? For you have felt through all my goods; what have you found of all the goods of your house? Set **it** here before my brothers and your brothers, and let them decide between the two of us. These twenty years I **have been** with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and the rams of your flock I have not eaten. The torn I did not bring to you; I, I bore the loss of it; from my hand you required it, stolen by day and stolen by night. **Thus** I was: in the day the heat consumed me, and the frost in the night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. These **have been** for me twenty years in your house: I served you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flock, and you changed my wages ten times. If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been for me, surely now you would have sent me away empty. My affliction and the toil of my hands God has seen, and He decided last night."*

Now Jacob got angry, and twenty years of bottled-up hurt came out. "What is my transgression?" he said. "What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued after me?" He listed his faithful service. Laban's sheep and goats had not miscarried. Jacob had not eaten his rams. When wild animals tore a sheep, Jacob paid for it out of his own pocket, even though shepherds were not normally held responsible for that (Exodus 22:13). He worked through the heat of the day and the frost of the night. "Sleep fled from my eyes."

Then Jacob gave God the glory again. "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been for me," Laban would have sent him away "empty." The "Fear of Isaac" is an unusual name for God. It means the God Isaac feared and worshiped with reverence.

Jacob's words are a good picture of honest work for a dishonest boss. He did not cut corners because Laban cheated him. Paul tells believers to work "as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23). God sees the work no one else notices. "My affliction and the toil of my hands God has seen."

31:43-46 *And Laban answered and said to Jacob, "The daughters **are** my daughters, and the sons **are** my sons, and the flock **is** my flock, and all that you see, it **is** mine. And to my daughters, what can I do to these today, or to their sons whom they have borne? And now come, let us cut a covenant, I and you, and it shall be for a witness between me and you." And Jacob took a stone and raised it up **as** a pillar. And Jacob said to his brothers, "Gather stones." And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap.*

Laban did not answer Jacob's charges. He just repeated his claims: "The daughters are my daughters," the children his children, the flocks his flocks, "all that you see, it is mine." Laban never stopped thinking of people as property.

But he knew he could not win, so he offered a covenant. Jacob set up a stone as a pillar. His relatives gathered stones into a heap, and they ate there. As when Isaac made peace with Abimelech (26:30), a shared meal sealed the agreement.

31:47-50 *And Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, and Jacob called it Galeed. And Laban said, "This heap **is** a witness between me and you today." Therefore he called its name Galeed, and Mizpah, for he said, "May the LORD watch between me and you when we are hidden each from his neighbor. If you mistreat my daughters, and if you take wives besides my daughters, **though** no man **is** with us, see, God **is** a witness between me and you."*

The two men named the heap in their own languages. Laban used Aramaic: "Jegar-sahadutha." Jacob used Hebrew: "Galeed." Both mean heap of witness. It is the first Aramaic in the Bible, and a reminder that Jacob and Laban came from different worlds.

The place was also called Mizpah, which means "watchtower." Laban said, "May the LORD watch between me and you when we are hidden each from his neighbor." Today these words are sometimes engraved on jewelry as a sweet blessing between friends. In context, they are not sweet at all. Laban was really saying that he did not trust Jacob, so God had better keep an eye on him. He warned Jacob not to mistreat his daughters or take other wives.

Even so, the words point to something true. God does see what happens when no one else is watching.

31:51-55 *And Laban said to Jacob, "Look, this heap, and look, the pillar that I have set up between me and you. This heap **is** a witness, and the pillar **is** a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and that you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor judge between us, the God of their father." And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. And Jacob sacrificed a sacrifice in the hill country, and he called his brothers to eat bread; and they ate bread and lodged in the hill country. And Laban rose early in the morning, and he kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them. And Laban went and returned to his place.*

The heap marked a boundary. Neither man would cross it "for harm." Laban said, "May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor judge between us, the God of their father." He seems to lump together the God of Abraham with the gods of Nahor and Terah, who worshiped other gods (Joshua 24:2). Jacob would not swear that way. He "swore by the Fear of his father Isaac," the one true God.

Jacob offered a sacrifice and shared a meal, and in the morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and daughters goodbye and went home. That is the last we see of Laban in the Bible.

God had kept His word. Twenty years earlier He promised to bring Jacob back (28:15). He protected Jacob from Laban's anger and turned a dangerous chase into a peace treaty. When God says, "I will be with you," He means it, even when the people around us are hard to live with.

Chapter 31 Summary

Laban's sons grew jealous of Jacob, and Laban turned cold. The LORD told Jacob to return to Canaan and promised to be with him. Jacob explained to Rachel and Leah how God had protected him from their father's cheating, and they agreed to go. Rachel stole her father's household idols,

and Jacob left without telling Laban. Laban chased them to Gilead, but God warned him in a dream not to harm Jacob. Laban searched for his gods and did not find them, because Rachel hid them in her camel saddle. Jacob angrily listed twenty years of faithful service and gave God the credit for his protection. The two men made a covenant at a heap of stones called Galeed and Mizpah, promising not to cross it to harm each other, and Laban returned home.

People and Places

- Laban the Aramean: Jacob's uncle and father-in-law, the brother of Rebekah, who lived in Haran.
- Paddan-aram: the region of northern Mesopotamia around Haran, where Laban lived.
- Gilead: the hill country east of the Jordan River.
- Galeed and Jegar-sahadutha: the Hebrew and Aramaic names for the heap of stones; both mean heap of witness.
- Mizpah: "watchtower," another name given to the place where Jacob and Laban made their covenant.
- Teraphim: household idols or images of family gods; many were small, but some were larger (1 Samuel 19:13).

Chapter 31 Study Questions

1. Why did Jacob's relationship with Laban's family turn sour? (31:1-2)

2. What did God tell Jacob to do, and what did He promise? (31:3)

3. In chapter 30 the flocks grew while Jacob used peeled branches. Who does he give the credit to now, and why does that change matter? (31:7-12)

4. The angel of God says, "I am the God of Bethel." What does that tell you about who was speaking to Jacob? (31:11-13)

5. What did Rachel steal from her father, and how did she hide it? (31:19, 34-35)

6. What did God warn Laban in his dream? (31:24, 29)

7. How did Jacob describe his twenty years of work for Laban? (31:38-41)

8. Laban's words at Mizpah are often used today as a blessing between friends. What did they mean when Laban said them, and why does reading in context matter? (31:48-52)

9. Jacob worked faithfully even for a man who cheated him. How does that challenge the way you work?

10. Rachel carried her father's gods with her into a new life. Is there anything from your old life you are still holding on to that you need to leave behind?

Chapter 32: Jacob Wrestles with God

Scripture

32:1-21 And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And Jacob said when he saw them, "This ***is*** the camp of God." And he called the name of that place Mahanaim. And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother, to the land of Seir, the territory of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, "Thus you shall say to my lord, to Esau: 'Thus says your servant Jacob: With Laban I have sojourned, and I have stayed until now. And I have oxen and donkeys, flocks and ***male*** servants and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, to find favor in your eyes.'" And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother, to Esau, and he is also coming to meet you, and four hundred men ***are*** with him." And Jacob was exceedingly afraid, and he was distressed; and he divided the people who ***were*** with him, and the flock and the herd and the camels, into two camps. And he said, "If Esau comes to the one camp and strikes it, and the camp that remains will become an escape." And Jacob said, "God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, LORD, who said to me, 'Return to your land and to your kindred, and I will do good with you,' I am too small for all the ***acts of*** steadfast love and all the faithfulness that You have done with Your servant; for with my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and strike me, mother with children. And You, You said, 'I will surely do good with you, and I will make your seed like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted for multitude.'" And he lodged there that night, and he took from what had come into his hand a gift for Esau his brother: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty nursing camels and their young, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. And he gave ***them*** into the hand of his servants, each drove by itself, and he said to his servants, "Pass over before me, and put a space between drove and drove." And he commanded the first, saying, "When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, saying, 'Whose ***are*** you? And where are you going? And whose ***are*** these before you?' and you shall say, '***They are*** your servant Jacob's; it ***is*** a gift sent to my lord, to Esau; and look, he also ***is*** behind us.'" And he commanded also the second, also the third, also all who were going after the droves, saying, "According to this word you shall speak to Esau when you find him, and you shall say, 'Also, look, your servant Jacob ***is*** behind us.'" For he said, "Let me appease his face with the gift that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will lift up my face." And the gift passed over before him, and he lodged that night in the camp.

32:22-32 And he rose up that night, and he took his two wives and his two female servants and his eleven children, and he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. And he took them and sent them across the wadi, and he sent across what ***belonged*** to him. And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the going up of the dawn. And he saw that he had not prevailed against him, and he touched the socket of his thigh; and the socket of the thigh of Jacob was dislocated as he wrestled with him. And he said, "Let me go, for the dawn has come up." And he said, "I will not let you go unless you have blessed me." And he said to him, "What ***is*** your name?" And he said, "Jacob." And he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men, and you have prevailed." And Jacob asked and said, "Please tell ***me*** your name." And he

said, "Why ***is*** this, ***that*** you ask for my name?" And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life has been delivered." And the sun rose on him as he passed Penuel, and he ***was*** limping on his thigh. Therefore the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which ***is*** on the socket of the thigh, to this day, for he touched the socket of the thigh of Jacob in the sinew of the hip.

Chapter 32 Preview

Jacob has escaped Laban, but a bigger problem waits ahead. Twenty years earlier he stole his brother's blessing, and Esau vowed to kill him (27:41). Now Jacob must face Esau to come home. He sends a friendly message, and the reply comes back: Esau is coming with four hundred men. Jacob is terrified. He splits his camp, prays for deliverance, and sends wave after wave of gifts ahead to soften his brother's heart.

Then, alone at night by the Jabbok River, Jacob is attacked by a mysterious Man who wrestles with him until dawn. The Man touches Jacob's hip and puts it out of joint, yet Jacob will not let go until he is blessed. God gives him a new name, Israel. Jacob limps away from that place a changed man. He has seen God face to face and lived.

Chapter 32 Study

32:1-2 *And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And Jacob said when he saw them, "This **is** the camp of God." And he called the name of that place Mahanaim.*

As Jacob left Laban behind, "the angels of God met him." Twenty years earlier, when he fled from home, he saw angels going up and down a ladder at Bethel (28:12). Now, as he comes back, angels meet him again. God bookends Jacob's years away with reminders that heaven has been watching over him the whole time.

Jacob named the place Mahanaim, which means two camps. There was Jacob's camp, and there was God's camp. Jacob was not traveling alone. Elisha's servant learned the same lesson when his eyes were opened to see the hills full of horses and chariots of fire (2 Kings 6:17). Believers are surrounded by more help than we can see.

32:3-5 *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother, to the land of Seir, the territory of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, "Thus you shall say to my lord, to Esau: 'Thus says your servant Jacob: With Laban I have sojourned, and I have stayed until now. And I have oxen and donkeys, flocks and **male** servants and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, to find favor in your eyes.'"*

Jacob sent messengers ahead to Esau in Seir, the land of Edom, south and east of the Dead Sea. His message was humble. He called Esau "my lord" and himself "your servant Jacob." That is a big change. The blessing Jacob stole had said that he would be lord over his brother (27:29). Now Jacob takes the low place.

He also let Esau know he had plenty of animals and servants. That was probably his way of saying he was not coming back to take anything, because he already had enough. He hoped to "find favor" in his brother's sight.

When we have wronged someone, humility is the right first step. Jacob did not demand his rights. He reached out with respect.

32:6-8 *And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother, to Esau, and he is also coming to meet you, and four hundred men **are** with him." And Jacob was exceedingly afraid, and he was distressed; and he divided the people who **were** with him, and the flock and the herd and the camels, into two camps. And he said, "If Esau comes to the one camp and strikes it, and the camp that remains will become an escape."*

The messengers came back with frightening news. Esau was coming, "and four hundred men are with him." Four hundred men is a small army. We aren't told what Esau intended. Jacob assumed the worst.

"Jacob was exceedingly afraid, and he was distressed." Jacob did what he always did first: he made a plan. He split his people and animals into "two camps," so that if Esau attacked one, the other could escape. The echo of Mahanaim is hard to miss. God had shown Jacob two camps, His and Jacob's. Now Jacob, in fear, makes two camps of his own.

Planning is not wrong, but Jacob would soon learn that his real need was God Himself.

32:9-12 *And Jacob said, "God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, LORD, who said to me, 'Return to your land and to your kindred, and I will do good with you,' I am too small for all the **acts of** steadfast love and all the faithfulness that You have done with Your servant; for with my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and strike me, mother with children. And You, You said, 'I will surely do good with you, and I will make your seed like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted for multitude.'"*

Jacob's prayer is a good model for us. Jacob begins with who God is: "God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac." He reminds God of His command: "Return to your land and to your kindred." He confesses his unworthiness: "I am too small for all the acts of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that You have done with Your servant." That steadfast love is God's loyal, covenant love, the love that keeps its promises.

Jacob remembers where he started: "with my staff I crossed this Jordan." Now he has "become two camps." Then he asks plainly, "Deliver me, please." He names his fear honestly. And he ends by standing on God's promise: "I will surely do good with you, and I will make your seed like the sand of the sea."

Praying God's promises back to Him is faith, not bossing God around. We pray boldly because God has spoken first.

32:13-21 *And he lodged there that night, and he took from what had come into his hand a gift for Esau his brother: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty nursing camels and their young, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. And he gave **them** into the hand of his servants, each drove by itself, and he said to his servants, "Pass over before me, and put a space between drove and drove." And he commanded the first, saying, "When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, saying, 'Whose **are** you? And where are you going? And whose **are** these before you?' and you shall say, '**They are** your servant Jacob's; it **is** a gift sent to my lord, to Esau; and look, he also **is** behind us.'" And he commanded also the second, also the third, also all who were going after the droves, saying, "According to this word you shall speak to Esau when you find him, and you shall say, 'Also, look, your servant Jacob **is** behind us.'" For he said, "Let me appease his face with the gift that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will lift up my face." And the gift passed over before him, and he lodged that night in the camp.*

After praying, Jacob went right back to planning. He picked out a huge present for Esau: hundreds of goats and sheep, thirty camels with their colts, cows, bulls and donkeys. He sent them ahead in separate droves with space between them. Each servant was to say the same thing: these are "a gift sent to my lord, to Esau," and Jacob "is behind us."

Jacob's thinking is stated plainly: "Let me appease his face with the gift that goes before me." To appease means to calm someone's anger. Wave after wave of gifts would hit Esau before he ever saw Jacob's face.

Is this faith or fear? Probably some of both. Wise planning and prayer can go together (Nehemiah 4:9). Jacob may also have been trying to pay back some of what he took. But he still seemed to trust his gifts more than his God. That night God would deal with that.

32:22-23 *And he rose up that night, and he took his two wives and his two female servants and his eleven children, and he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. And he took them and sent them across the wadi, and he sent across what **belonged** to him.*

In the night Jacob got up and sent his whole family across the Jabbok, a stream that flows west into the Jordan. He sent across everything he owned. Then he stayed behind.

Why did he stay behind? Maybe he wanted to pray. Maybe he couldn't sleep. Whatever the reason, God had arranged a meeting. Sometimes God has to get us alone, with nothing in our hands and no one to lean on, before He can do His deepest work in us.

32:24-25 *And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the going up of the dawn. And he saw that he had not prevailed against him, and he touched the socket of his thigh; and the socket of the thigh of Jacob was dislocated as he wrestled with him.*

"Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the going up of the dawn." Jacob had wrestled with people all his life. He grabbed Esau's heel at birth (25:26). He wrestled the birthright and blessing away from his brother. He wrestled with Laban for twenty years. Now he wrestles with God.

Who was this Man? Verse 30 says Jacob saw God face to face. Hosea says Jacob "struggled with the angel and prevailed" (Hosea 12:4) and calls Him God in the verse before. Many believe this was the angel of the LORD, the same One who met Hagar, here appearing in human form (see chapter 16). He looked like a man, He is called an angel, and Jacob says He is God.

The Man could have ended the fight anytime. With one touch He put Jacob's hip out of joint. The match was never really in doubt. God let Jacob wrestle all night so Jacob would learn something.

32:26 *And he said, "Let me go, for the dawn has come up." And he said, "I will not let you go unless you have blessed me."*

"Let me go, for the dawn has come up." Jacob answered, "I will not let you go unless you have blessed me."

Something changed in that moment. With his hip out of joint, Jacob could no longer fight. All he could do was hang on. The man who had always grabbed blessing by his own strength now clung to God because he had no strength left.

That is a picture of real faith. Hosea says Jacob "wept and sought His favor" (Hosea 12:4). The wrestling turned into weeping and begging. God often has to break our self-reliance before we will cling to Him. A limp can be a gift if it teaches us to hold on to God.

32:27-28 *And he said to him, "What **is** your name?" And he said, "Jacob." And he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men, and you have prevailed."*

"What is your name?" God knew the answer. The question made Jacob say it out loud. Jacob means he grabs the heel, or he deceives (27:36). The last time Jacob was asked his name, by his father Isaac, he lied and said he was Esau (27:18-19). This time he told the truth: "Jacob." He confessed who he was.

Then God gave him a new name: "Israel." It most likely means he strives with God, or God strives. The reason given: "you have striven with God and with men, and you have prevailed." Jacob prevailed not by overpowering God but by clinging to Him for a blessing.

It is the name that would be given to the whole nation. The twelve tribes would be "the sons of Israel." When God changes a name in Scripture, He is changing a life.

32:29 *And Jacob asked and said, "Please tell **me** your name." And he said, "Why **is** this, **that** you ask for my name?" And he blessed him there.*

Jacob asked the Man's name. "Why is this, that you ask for my name?" He did not give it. But "He blessed him there."

Later, the angel of the LORD gave a similar answer to Manoah, Samson's father, saying His name was wonderful (Judges 13:18). God reveals Himself on His terms, not ours. Jacob did not get every answer he wanted, but he got the blessing he needed.

32:30-32 *And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life has been delivered." And the sun rose on him as he passed Penuel, and he **was** limping on his thigh. Therefore the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which **is** on the socket of the thigh, to this day, for he touched the socket of the thigh of Jacob in the sinew of the hip.*

Jacob named the place Peniel, which means face of God. He said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life has been delivered." Jacob was amazed to be alive. No sinful man can see God's full glory and live (Exodus 33:20), but God had come to Jacob in a form he could bear.

"The sun rose on him." Twenty years earlier, when Jacob fled, the sun set on him at Bethel (28:11). Now the sun rises on a new man. "He was limping on his thigh." Jacob would carry that limp the rest of his life, a daily reminder of the night God broke him and blessed him.

Moses adds that "to this day" Israel did not eat the sinew of the hip, in memory of that night. Genesis presents this as a custom of remembrance, not as a command from God.

The limp is worth thinking about. Jacob walked away weaker in body but stronger in faith. God sometimes leaves us with a weakness so that we will lean on Him. Paul learned the same thing: God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Chapter 32 Summary

As Jacob traveled home, angels of God met him, and he named the place Mahanaim. He sent humble messages to Esau, but learned Esau was coming with four hundred men. In fear, Jacob divided his camp into two companies and prayed, confessing his unworthiness and standing on God's promises. He sent large gifts ahead to appease his brother. That night, alone by the Jabbok, a Man wrestled with Jacob until dawn and touched his hip, putting it out of joint. Jacob would not let go until he was blessed. God changed his name from Jacob to Israel, because he had striven with God and with men and prevailed. Jacob named the place Peniel, saying he had seen God face to face and lived, and he left limping.

People and Places

- Mahanaim: two camps, the place where angels met Jacob.
- Seir and Edom: the mountain country south and east of the Dead Sea where Esau lived.
- Jabbok: a stream east of the Jordan that flows west into it.
- Peniel (Penuel): face of God, where Jacob wrestled with God.
- Israel: Jacob's new name, most likely meaning he strives with God.

Chapter 32 Study Questions

1. Who met Jacob as he left Laban, and what did he name that place? (32:1-2)

2. What news did Jacob's messengers bring back, and how did he respond? (32:6-8)

3. What parts of Jacob's prayer can you find: praise, confession, request and promise? (32:9-12)

4. What did Jacob send ahead to Esau, and why? (32:13-20)

5. What happened to Jacob when he was left alone at the Jabbok? (32:24-25)

6. With his hip out of joint, Jacob could no longer fight, only hold on. What does that show about how God changes a self-reliant person? (32:25-26)

7. What new name did God give Jacob, and what does it mean? Why do you think God first made Jacob say his old name? (32:27-28)

8. Jacob said he had seen God face to face and lived. How does that fit with Exodus 33:20? (32:30)

9. Jacob prayed and then went right back to planning. How do you balance prayer and planning when you are afraid?

10. Has God ever used a "limp," a weakness or hard time, to teach you to depend on Him?

Chapter 33: Jacob Meets Esau

Scripture

33:1-11 And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and look, Esau ***was*** coming, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children to Leah and to Rachel and to the two female servants. And he put the female servants and their children first, and Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph behind ***them***. And he, he passed over before them, and he bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. And Esau ran to meet him, and he embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him; and they wept. And he lifted up his eyes and saw the women and the children, and he said, "Who ***are*** these with you?" And he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." And the female servants came near, they and their children, and they bowed down. And Leah also came near, and her children, and they bowed down; and afterward Joseph came near, and Rachel, and they bowed down. And he said, "What to you ***is*** all this camp that I met?" And he said, "To find favor in the eyes of my lord." And Esau said, "I have much, my brother; let what ***is*** yours be yours." And Jacob said, "No, please; if, please, I have found favor in your eyes, then accept my gift from my hand, for therefore I have seen your face, like seeing the face of God, and you have been pleased with me. Please take my blessing that has been brought to you, for God has been gracious to me, and for I have everything." And he urged him, and he took ***it***.

33:12-20 And he said, "Let us set out, and let us go, and let me go before you." And he said to him, "My lord knows that the children ***are*** weak, and the flock and the herd that are nursing ***are*** on me; and ***if*** they drive them hard one day, and all the flock will die. Let my lord, please, pass over before his servant, and I, I will lead on gently, according to the pace of the possessions that ***are*** before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord, to Seir." And Esau said, "Please let me leave with you some of the people who ***are*** with me." And he said, "Why this? Let me find favor in the eyes of my lord." And Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. And Jacob set out to Succoth, and he built a house for himself, and for his livestock he made booths. Therefore he called the name of the place Succoth. And Jacob came safely ***to*** the city of Shechem, which ***is*** in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram; and he camped before the city. And he bought the portion of the field where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for a hundred pieces of money. And he set up an altar there, and he called it "God, the God of Israel."

Chapter 33 Preview

The night of wrestling is over, and the moment Jacob has dreaded for twenty years has come. Esau appears on the horizon with four hundred men. Jacob lines up his family, goes out in front of them, and bows to the ground seven times. Then something happens that Jacob never expected. Esau runs to him, throws his arms around his neck, and kisses him, and the two brothers weep.

God has been at work in Esau's heart as well as in Jacob's. After a gracious exchange of gifts, the brothers part ways. Jacob settles at Succoth and then near the city of Shechem in Canaan, where

he buys land and builds an altar to "the God of Israel." Jacob is finally home in the land God promised, though the next chapter will show that the land holds dangers of its own.

Chapter 33 Study

33:1-3 *And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and look, Esau **was** coming, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children to Leah and to Rachel and to the two female servants. And he put the female servants and their children first, and Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph behind **them**. And he, he passed over before them, and he bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.*

Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, "and with him four hundred men." He divided the children among their mothers and arranged them in order: the maids and their children first, then Leah and her children, and Rachel and Joseph last, in the safest spot.

That order said something painful. Everyone could see who Jacob loved most. Favoritism had already caused trouble between Rachel and Leah, and it will cause much worse trouble with Joseph and his brothers in chapter 37.

Then Jacob did something new. He "passed over before them." The night before, he sent everyone ahead of him. Now, limping from his meeting with God, he goes first. He "bowed down to the ground seven times," a sign of deep respect, the way a servant would approach a king. The man who once grabbed for the top spot now takes the low place.

33:4 *And Esau ran to meet him, and he embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him; and they wept.*

"Esau ran to meet him, and he embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him; and they wept."

Jacob braced for revenge and received a hug. Twenty years earlier Esau wanted to kill him. Now he runs to him. Genesis does not say what changed Esau's heart, but Jacob had prayed, "Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother" (32:11), and God answered in a better way than Jacob imagined. God did not just protect Jacob from Esau. He gave Jacob his brother back.

Jesus used similar words in the parable of the prodigal son. When the son came home, the father ran to him and "fell on his neck and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). Forgiveness runs. It does not wait at a distance with arms folded.

Most of what Jacob feared never happened. He spent a sleepless night picturing an army bent on revenge, and God had already settled the matter. Many of us lose sleep the same way. Jesus told us not to worry about tomorrow (Matthew 6:34). That does not mean every hard meeting will end in hugs. It means the God who went ahead of Jacob goes ahead of us too, and He can soften a heart we thought was closed for good.

33:5-7 *And he lifted up his eyes and saw the women and the children, and he said, "Who **are** these with you?" And he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." And the female servants came near, they and their children, and they bowed down. And Leah also came near, and her children, and they bowed down; and afterward Joseph came near, and Rachel, and they bowed down.*

Esau asked about the women and children. Jacob answered, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." Jacob saw his family as a gift of God's grace, not as something he had earned.

Then each group came forward and bowed: the maids and their children, then Leah and her children, and finally Joseph with Rachel. It is a simple scene, but it shows a whole family humbling itself before the brother Jacob had wronged. When we seek to make things right with someone, our humility can be a witness to the people closest to us.

33:8-11 *And he said, "What to you **is** all this camp that I met?" And he said, "To find favor in the eyes of my lord." And Esau said, "I have much, my brother; let what **is** yours be yours." And Jacob said, "No, please; if, please, I have found favor in your eyes, then accept my gift from my hand, for therefore I have seen your face, like seeing the face of God, and you have been pleased with me. Please take my blessing that has been brought to you, for God has been gracious to me, and for I have everything." And he urged him, and he took **it**.*

Esau asked about all the animals he had met on the road. Jacob explained they were meant "to find favor in the eyes of my lord." Esau answered, "I have much, my brother." Notice the warmth of that word. Jacob kept calling Esau "my lord." Esau called Jacob "my brother."

Jacob insisted. "For therefore I have seen your face, like seeing the face of God, and you have been pleased with me." The night before, Jacob saw the face of God at Peniel and lived (32:30). Now he sees grace in his brother's face. The same God who met Jacob at the river had gone ahead to prepare Esau.

Jacob also said, "Please take my blessing." He used the word for "blessing," not the usual word for a gift. Jacob may have been trying in some way to give back what he stole. He urged Esau to take it, "for God has been gracious to me, and for I have everything." Esau finally accepted, and in taking the gift he also accepted the peace that came with it.

33:12-15 *And he said, "Let us set out, and let us go, and let me go before you." And he said to him, "My lord knows that the children **are** weak, and the flock and the herd that are nursing **are** on me; and **if** they drive them hard one day, and all the flock will die. Let my lord, please, pass over before his servant, and I, I will lead on gently, according to the pace of the possessions that **are** before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord, to Seir." And Esau said, "Please let me leave with you some of the people who **are** with me." And he said, "Why this? Let me find favor in the eyes of my lord."*

Esau offered to travel with Jacob and even to leave some of his men as an escort. Jacob politely said no. The children were "weak," and the young animals could die "if they drive them hard one day." He would come along slowly and come "to Seir."

Genesis is silent on whether Jacob ever went to Seir. Instead, he went the other way. Some see this as old Jacob slipping back into half-truths. Others think Jacob was simply wise to keep some distance, since living close together might have revived old tensions, and God had told him to return to Canaan, not to Seir. The text does not judge him either way. What we do know is that the brothers stayed at peace. They stood together years later to bury their father Isaac (35:29).

Reconciliation does not always mean living side by side. Sometimes it means being at peace with someone while going separate ways.

33:16-17 *And Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. And Jacob set out to Succoth, and he built a house for himself, and for his livestock he made booths. Therefore he called the name of the place Succoth.*

Esau went home to Seir. Jacob went to Succoth, east of the Jordan, and "built a house for himself" and shelters for his animals. "Succoth" means "booths," the simple shelters made from branches. Later Israel would celebrate the Feast of Booths, though that feast looked back to the wilderness, not to this place.

Building a house suggests Jacob stayed there for some time, perhaps several years, since Dinah seems to be a young woman by the next chapter.

The two brothers went to two different places, and their families would become two different nations. Esau became the father of the Edomites (chapter 36), and Jacob the father of Israel. Sadly, the peace between the brothers did not always last between their descendants. Edom refused to let Israel pass through its land in Moses' day (Numbers 20:14-21), and the prophet Obadiah rebuked Edom for cheering when Jerusalem fell. Still, on this day, God gave two brothers peace.

33:18-20 *And Jacob came safely **to** the city of Shechem, which **is** in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram; and he camped before the city. And he bought the portion of the field where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for a hundred pieces of money. And he set up an altar there, and he called it "God, the God of Israel."*

Jacob "came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan." The word "safely" can also mean "in peace," and it recalls Jacob's vow at Bethel. He had asked God that he might "return in peace to the house of my father" (28:21). God did.

Jacob bought a piece of land from the sons of Hamor "for a hundred pieces of money." This is only the second piece of land in Canaan that the family owned. The first was the cave Abraham bought to bury Sarah (23:16-20). Centuries later, Joseph's bones would be buried on this very plot (Joshua 24:32), and Jesus would sit by Jacob's well near here and talk with a Samaritan woman (John 4:5-6).

Then Jacob built an altar and called it "God, the God of Israel," in Hebrew El-Elohe-Israel. For the first time Jacob uses his new name. The God of Abraham and the God of Isaac is now Jacob's own God. That is a big step for every believer. It is good to have a godly heritage, but each of us must come to call Him our own God.

Yet Shechem may not have been where God wanted him. God had reminded Jacob of his vow at Bethel (31:13), and Jacob had promised to make Bethel God's house (28:22). Yet he settled near Shechem instead. Many think he stopped short of where God wanted him. Settling next to a Canaanite city brought Jacob's family into great danger, and the next chapter shows how poorly they handled it when evil came.

New Testament links: John 4:5 (alluded to); Acts 7:16 (alluded to)

Chapter 33 Summary

Jacob saw Esau coming with four hundred men. He arranged his family with Rachel and Joseph last, then went ahead himself and bowed to the ground seven times. Esau ran to meet him, embraced him and kissed him, and the brothers wept. Jacob introduced his family as the children God had graciously given him, and he urged Esau to accept his gift, saying that seeing Esau's face was like seeing the face of God. Esau accepted. Jacob declined Esau's offer to travel together, and Esau returned to Seir. Jacob went to Succoth and then came safely to Shechem in Canaan, where he bought land and built an altar called El-Elohe-Israel.

People and Places

- Succoth: "booths," a place east of the Jordan where Jacob built a house and shelters for his animals.
- Shechem: a Canaanite city in the hill country of central Canaan, also the name of the son of its ruler Hamor.
- Hamor: the ruler of Shechem, a Hivite.
- El-Elohe-Israel: God, the God of Israel, the name of Jacob's altar at Shechem.

Chapter 33 Study Questions

1. How did Jacob arrange his family when Esau came, and what did that reveal? (33:1-2)

2. Jacob went ahead of his family and bowed to the ground seven times. How does this compare with the blessing he once stole, which made him lord over his brother? (33:3; 27:29)

3. How did Esau greet Jacob? (33:4)

4. How did Jacob describe his children to Esau? (33:5)

5. Jacob said seeing Esau's face was like seeing the face of God. What do you think he meant, the morning after Peniel? (33:10; 32:30)

6. Why did Jacob say no to traveling with Esau? Do you read it as wisdom or as a polite evasion, and why? (33:12-17)

7. Where did Jacob settle, and what did he buy there? (33:17-19)

8. What did Jacob name his altar, and why is that name significant? (33:20)

9. Esau ran to forgive. Is there someone you need to run toward, either to forgive or to ask forgiveness?

10. Jacob called God "the God of Israel," his own God. Can you say that God is your God, not just the God of your parents?

Chapter 34: Dinah and Shechem

Scripture

34:1-12 And Dinah, the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. And Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite, the chief of the land, saw her, and he took her and lay with her and humbled her. And his soul clung to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman, and he spoke to the heart of the young woman. And Shechem said to Hamor his father, saying, "Take for me this girl for a wife." And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter; and his sons were with his livestock in the field, and Jacob kept silent until they came. And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. And the sons of Jacob came from the field when they heard; and the men were grieved, and they burned ***with anger*** exceedingly, for he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with the daughter of Jacob, and thus it is not done. And Hamor spoke with them, saying, "Shechem my son, his soul longs for your daughter. Please give her to him for a wife. And intermarry with us: your daughters you shall give to us, and our daughters you shall take for yourselves. And with us you shall dwell, and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade in it, and acquire possessions in it." And Shechem said to her father and to her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and what you say to me I will give. Increase upon me exceedingly the bride-price and gift, and let me give according as you say to me; and give me the young woman for a wife."

34:13-24 And the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father with deceit, and they spoke, because he had defiled Dinah their sister. And they said to them, "We are not able to do this thing, to give our sister to a man who has a foreskin, for it ***is*** a reproach to us. Only in this will we consent to you: if you will be like us, by every male of you being circumcised. And we will give our daughters to you, and your daughters we will take for ourselves, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. And if you will not listen to us to be circumcised, and we will take our daughter and go." And their words were good in the eyes of Hamor and in the eyes of Shechem, the son of Hamor. And the young man did not delay to do the thing, for he delighted in the daughter of Jacob. And he ***was*** more honored than all the house of his father. And Hamor and Shechem his son came to the gate of their city, and they spoke to the men of their city, saying, "These men, they ***are*** at peace with us; and let them dwell in the land and trade in it, and the land, look, ***is*** broad on both sides before them. Their daughters we will take for ourselves for wives, and our daughters we will give to them. Only in this will the men consent to us to dwell with us, to become one people: when every male among us is circumcised, as they are circumcised. Their livestock and their possessions and all their animals, will they not ***be*** ours? Only let us consent to them, and let them dwell with us." And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and to Shechem his son; and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

34:25-31 And it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, and two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, the brothers of Dinah, took each his sword and came upon the city securely, and they killed every male. And Hamor and Shechem his son they killed by the mouth of the sword, and they took Dinah from the house of Shechem and went out. The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister. Their flocks and their herds and their donkeys, and what ***was*** in the city and what ***was*** in the field, they took. And all their

wealth and all their little ones and their wives they took captive, and they plundered, and all that ***was*** in the house. And Jacob said to Simeon and to Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and among the Perizzites; and I ***am*** few in number, and they will gather against me and strike me, and I will be destroyed, I and my house." And they said, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?"

Chapter 34 Preview

God never once speaks in this chapter. Jacob's daughter Dinah goes out to visit the young women of the land, and Shechem, the son of the local ruler, takes her by force. He then wants to marry her, and his father Hamor comes to Jacob to arrange it.

Jacob's sons are rightly angry, but they answer with deceit. They agree to the marriage if every man in the city will be circumcised. While the men are still in pain, Simeon and Levi attack the city and kill every male, and their brothers loot it. Jacob is more worried about his reputation than about justice, and his sons answer with a hard question. The chapter shows how a family that has drifted from God responds badly to a terrible wrong: with silence, deceit and revenge instead of justice and prayer. The guilt for the rape belongs to Shechem alone.

Chapter 34 Study

34:1-2 *And Dinah, the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. And Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite, the chief of the land, saw her, and he took her and lay with her and humbled her.*

Dinah was the daughter of Leah. Many think she was a teenager by this time. She "went out to see the daughters of the land," the young women of Shechem. Scripture does not blame her for going. What happened to her was not her fault.

Shechem, the son of Hamor and "the chief of the land," saw her, and he "took her and lay with her and humbled her." This was rape. The Bible uses plain words because it does not hide evil or pretend it is less than it is.

If you or someone you love has suffered abuse, know this: God sees, and He calls it what it is. The shame belongs to the one who did the wrong, not to the one who was wronged. God is "near to the broken of heart" (Psalm 34:18). If this is your story, please talk with a pastor, a trusted counselor or the proper authorities. You do not have to carry it alone.

34:3-4 *And his soul clung to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman, and he spoke to the heart of the young woman. And Shechem said to Hamor his father, saying, "Take for me this girl for a wife."*

After the crime, Shechem "loved the young woman, and he spoke to the heart of the young woman." He told his father, "Take for me this girl for a wife."

Some readers soften Shechem because of these words. We should not. Feelings that come after a violent act do not undo it. Scripture tells us he "defiled" her (34:5). Shechem's desire was real, but

it was the desire of a man who took what he wanted first and asked later. He spoke first to his own father, not to Dinah's family, and all through the bargaining Dinah was kept in his house (34:26). He did not send her home.

Love that respects God's design waits, honors and protects. That is the kind of love Scripture calls us to (1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Ephesians 5:25).

34:5-7 *And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter; and his sons were with his livestock in the field, and Jacob kept silent until they came. And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. And the sons of Jacob came from the field when they heard; and the men were grieved, and they burned* ***with anger*** *exceedingly, for he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with the daughter of Jacob, and thus it is not done.*

Jacob heard what had happened, but "kept silent" until his sons came home. The text gives no reason. He may have been wise to wait for counsel. But in the rest of the chapter Jacob never speaks a word of grief for his daughter or of anger at the crime. His silence is troubling.

His sons felt what their father did not show. They "were grieved, and they burned with anger exceedingly." Shechem "had done a disgraceful thing in Israel," and "thus it is not done." Here the name Israel stands for Jacob's family as a people, not only for Jacob himself. God's people were meant to be different, with a different standard of purity and honor. Their anger at the wrong was right. What they did with it next was not.

34:8-12 *And Hamor spoke with them, saying, "Shechem my son, his soul longs for your daughter. Please give her to him for a wife. And intermarry with us: your daughters you shall give to us, and our daughters you shall take for yourselves. And with us you shall dwell, and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade in it, and acquire possessions in it." And Shechem said to her father and to her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and what you say to me I will give. Increase upon me exceedingly the bride-price and gift, and let me give according as you say to me; and give me the young woman for a wife."*

Hamor made his offer as if nothing had happened. He never apologized. He spoke of business. "Intermarry with us," he said. "Dwell and trade in it, and acquire possessions in it." Shechem added, "Increase upon me exceedingly the bride-price and gift."

Hamor's offer was a real danger to God's plan. If Jacob's family married into the Canaanites and blended in, the line of promise would disappear into the nations around it. Abraham had made sure Isaac did not marry a Canaanite woman (24:3), and Isaac had sent Jacob away for the same reason (28:1). Now the world was offering to absorb God's family with a friendly handshake. The world's invitations are often polite. That does not make them safe.

34:13-17 *And the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father with deceit, and they spoke, because he had defiled Dinah their sister. And they said to them, "We are not able to do this thing, to give our sister to a man who has a foreskin, for it **is** a reproach to us. Only in this will we consent to you: if you will be like us, by every male of you being circumcised. And we will give our daughters to you, and your daughters we will take for ourselves, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. And if you will not listen to us to be circumcised, and we will take our daughter and go."*

Jacob's sons answered "with deceit." They said they could not give their sister to a man "who has a foreskin," meaning a man who was not circumcised. Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham (17:10-11). So they made a condition: every male in the city must be circumcised.

This was a terrible misuse of a holy sign. Circumcision was never meant as a trick or a weapon. The brothers used the sign of God's covenant as bait for a trap. They had learned deception well. Their father had deceived Isaac, their grandfather Laban had deceived Jacob, and now the sons deceived Hamor.

The Bible never treats God's holy things lightly. Using faith as a cover for our own plans is a serious sin.

34:18-24 *And their words were good in the eyes of Hamor and in the eyes of Shechem, the son of Hamor. And the young man did not delay to do the thing, for he delighted in the daughter of Jacob. And he **was** more honored than all the house of his father. And Hamor and Shechem his son came to the gate of their city, and they spoke to the men of their city, saying, "These men, they **are** at peace with us; and let them dwell in the land and trade in it, and the land, look, **is** broad on both sides before them. Their daughters we will take for ourselves for wives, and our daughters we will give to them. Only in this will the men consent to us to dwell with us, to become one people: when every male among us is circumcised, as they are circumcised. Their livestock and their possessions and all their animals, will they not **be** ours? Only let us consent to them, and let them dwell with us." And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and to Shechem his son; and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.*

The offer seemed reasonable to Hamor and Shechem. Shechem "did not delay," because he wanted Dinah. And Shechem "was more honored than all the house of his father," so his word carried weight.

At the city gate, where public business was done, they pitched the deal to the men of the city. Listen to what they told their own people. They did not mention Dinah or the crime. They said, "Their livestock and their possessions and all their animals, will they not be ours?" Hamor and Shechem planned to swallow Jacob's family and its wealth. The men of the city agreed for the same reason, and every male was circumcised.

Both sides were scheming. Nobody in this chapter is seeking God.

34:25-26 *And it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, and two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, the brothers of Dinah, took each his sword and came upon the city securely, and they killed every male. And Hamor and Shechem his son they killed by the mouth of the sword, and they took Dinah from the house of Shechem and went out.*

On the third day, when the men were "in pain," Simeon and Levi, Dinah's full brothers, took their swords and "came upon the city securely." They killed every male, including Hamor and Shechem, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house.

Their anger at the crime against their sister was understandable. But they took revenge on a whole city for the sin of one man, and they did it through lies and murder. God's Law would later set limits on punishment so that justice would fit the crime (Exodus 21:23-25; Deuteronomy 24:16). Paul tells believers they must be "not avenging yourselves," because vengeance belongs to the Lord (Romans 12:19, quoting Deuteronomy 32:35). Later Jacob condemns it in strong words: "Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce" (49:5-7).

34:27-29 *The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister. Their flocks and their herds and their donkeys, and what **was** in the city and what **was** in the field, they took. And all their wealth and all their little ones and their wives they took captive, and they plundered, and all that **was** in the house.*

The rest of Jacob's sons joined in. They "plundered the city." They took flocks, herds and donkeys, everything in the houses, and even the women and children. They said they did it "because they had defiled their sister." But taking the wealth of the city shows that justice had turned into greed.

Hamor and Shechem had looked at Jacob's family and asked whether their livestock and property would become theirs (34:23). In the end, the opposite happened. Sin often turns back on the one who plans it. Yet that does not make the brothers right. Two wrongs were done in this city, and God approved neither.

34:30-31 *And Jacob said to Simeon and to Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and among the Perizzites; and I **am** few in number, and they will gather against me and strike me, and I will be destroyed, I and my house." And they said, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?"*

Jacob finally spoke, but only to Simeon and Levi, and only about himself. "You have brought trouble on me." He feared the Canaanites and Perizzites would attack, "And I am few in number." Every sentence is about "me" and "my." He said nothing about Dinah, nothing about the wickedness of the slaughter, and nothing about God.

His sons answered, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?" Their question has force. Someone in the family had to care about Dinah. But their answer did not excuse what they had done.

The cost of that day came due later. On his deathbed Jacob said Simeon and Levi would be scattered in Israel (49:7). And yet God's grace shows up even there. The tribe of Levi was scattered

among the other tribes, but as priests and teachers of the Law, after the Levites stood with the LORD at Mount Sinai (Exodus 32:26-29). God can take a family's worst moment and, in time, bring good out of it, though that never makes the sin itself good.

The chapter ends with no resolution, no word from God, and no comfort for Dinah. Sometimes the Bible leaves us sitting in the mess. The next chapter shows God calling Jacob back to Bethel and to Himself. We are never told what became of Dinah. Some wounds are not healed within the pages of Genesis, but the God who is near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18) has not forgotten them.

Chapter 34 Summary

Dinah, Leah's daughter, went out to visit the women of the land, and Shechem, the son of Hamor, took her by force. Shechem then wanted to marry her, and Hamor asked Jacob to let the two families intermarry and trade together. Jacob kept silent, but his sons were grieved and angry. They answered with deceit, demanding that every male in the city be circumcised. Hamor and Shechem persuaded the men of the city, hoping to gain Jacob's wealth. On the third day, while the men were in pain, Simeon and Levi killed every male, including Hamor and Shechem, and took Dinah back. The other brothers looted the city. Jacob rebuked Simeon and Levi for endangering him, and they replied, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?"

Chapter 34 Study Questions

1. Who was Dinah, and where did she go? (34:1)

2. The study says plainly that what happened to Dinah was rape and was not her fault. Why does it matter to name a wrong plainly and to put the blame where it belongs? (34:1-2, 7)

3. How did Jacob respond when he heard the news? How did his sons respond? (34:5-7)

4. What did Hamor offer Jacob's family? Why was that offer a danger to God's plan? (34:8-10)

5. What condition did Jacob's sons set, and what was wrong with how they used it? (34:13-17)

6. What reason did Hamor and Shechem give the men of their city for agreeing? (34:23)

7. Simeon and Levi were angry at a real wrong. Why was their response still sin, and how did Jacob judge it at the end of his life? (34:25-29; 49:5-7)

8. What did Jacob say to Simeon and Levi, and what was missing from his words? (34:30)

9. Jacob's sons were right to be angry but wrong in what they did. How can you be angry at real wrong without sinning? (Ephesians 4:26)

10. No one in this chapter seeks God, and the family answers evil with silence, deceit and revenge. How can a family turn to God, and to wise help, when something terrible happens?

Chapter 35: Return to Bethel

Scripture

35:1-15 And God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up ***to*** Bethel, and dwell there, and make there an altar to the God who appeared to you when you fled from before Esau your brother." And Jacob said to his household and to all who ***were*** with him, "Remove the gods of the foreigner that ***are*** in your midst, and purify yourselves, and change your clothes. And let us arise, and let us go up ***to*** Bethel, and I will make there an altar to the God who answered me in the day of my distress, and He was with me on the way that I have gone." And they gave to Jacob all the gods of the foreigner that ***were*** in their hand, and the rings that ***were*** in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak that ***was*** near Shechem. And they set out, and the terror of God was on the cities that ***were*** around them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob. And Jacob came to Luz, which ***is*** in the land of Canaan, that ***is*** Bethel, he and all the people who ***were*** with him. And he built there an altar, and he called the place El-bethel, for there God had been revealed to him when he fled from before his brother. And Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, died, and she was buried below Bethel, under the oak; and he called its name Allon-bacuth. And God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. And God said to him, "Your name ***is*** Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob again, but Israel shall be your name." And He called his name Israel. And God said to him, "I ***am*** God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and an assembly of nations shall be from you, and kings shall come out from your loins. And the land which I gave to Abraham and to Isaac, to you I will give it, and to your seed after you I will give the land." And God went up from him at the place where He had spoken with him. And Jacob set up a pillar at the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured out on it a drink offering, and he poured on it oil. And Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him there Bethel.

35:16-29 And they set out from Bethel, and ***there*** was still a stretch of the land to go to Ephrath; and Rachel gave birth, and she had hard labor in her giving birth. And it came about, when she was in hard labor in her giving birth, and the midwife said to her, "Do not be afraid, for this also a son for you." And it came about, as her soul was going out, for she died, and she called his name Ben-oni; and his father called him Benjamin. And Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath, that ***is*** Bethlehem. And Jacob set up a pillar over her grave; it ***is*** the pillar of the grave of Rachel until this day. And Israel set out, and he pitched his tent beyond the tower of the flock (Migdal-Eder). And it came about, when Israel dwelt in that land, and Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, the concubine of his father; and Israel heard. And the sons of Jacob were twelve. The sons of Leah: the firstborn of Jacob, Reuben, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun. The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. And the sons of Bilhah, the female servant of Rachel: Dan and Naphtali. And the sons of Zilpah, the female servant of Leah: Gad and Asher. These ***are*** the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram. And Jacob came to Isaac his father ***at*** Mamre, Kiriath-arba, that ***is*** Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. And the days of Isaac were a hundred years and eighty years. And Isaac breathed his last and died, and he was gathered to his people, old and satisfied with days; and Esau and Jacob his sons buried him.

Chapter 35 Preview

After the disaster at Shechem, God speaks to Jacob again: go up to Bethel. Bethel was the place where God first met Jacob thirty years or so before, when he was running from Esau. Before they go, Jacob tells his household to get rid of their foreign gods and make themselves clean. They bury the idols under an oak, and God protects them on the road with a terror that falls on the cities around them.

At Bethel God appears to Jacob again, confirms his new name Israel, and repeats the promises He made to Abraham and Isaac. But the chapter also holds deep sorrow. Rebekah's old nurse dies. Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin, Jacob's twelfth son. Reuben sins against his father. And Isaac dies at a great age and is buried by his two sons. Life in God's family has both blessing and grief, and God is faithful through all of it.

Chapter 35 Study

35:1 *And God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up **to** Bethel, and dwell there, and make there an altar to the God who appeared to you when you fled from before Esau your brother."*

"Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there." After the silence of chapter 34, God speaks. He does not scold Jacob for the mess at Shechem. He calls him back to the place where it all began.

Jacob had made a vow at Bethel (28:20-22). He promised that if God brought him home safely, the LORD would be his God, and Bethel would be God's house. God kept His side. Jacob had settled at Shechem instead. Now God reminds him to finish the journey and "make there an altar to the God who appeared to you."

When we drift, God often calls us back to where we first met Him. Jesus told the church at Ephesus to remember from where they had fallen, repent, and do the deeds they did at first (Revelation 2:5). The way forward often begins by going back.

35:2-4 *And Jacob said to his household and to all who **were** with him, "Remove the gods of the foreigner that **are** in your midst, and purify yourselves, and change your clothes. And let us arise, and let us go up **to** Bethel, and I will make there an altar to the God who answered me in the day of my distress, and He was with me on the way that I have gone." And they gave to Jacob all the gods of the foreigner that **were** in their hand, and the rings that **were** in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak that **was** near Shechem.*

Jacob knew his household was not ready to meet God. He told them to "remove the gods of the foreigner" and "purify yourselves, and change your clothes." Some of these idols may have come from Laban's house, including the ones Rachel stole (31:19). Others may have come with the captives from Shechem (34:29). Jacob had let them stay. Now he deals with them.

They also gave up "the rings that were in their ears." These earrings may have been charms tied to idol worship. Jacob "hid them under the oak that was near Shechem." He buried the old life.

Here we see a picture of repentance. Repentance means turning away from sin and turning back to God. You cannot go up to Bethel carrying your idols. An idol is anything we trust, love or serve in God's place. Paul praised the Thessalonians because they "turned to God from the idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

35:5-7 *And they set out, and the terror of God was on the cities that **were** around them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob. And Jacob came to Luz, which **is** in the land of Canaan, that **is** Bethel, he and all the people who **were** with him. And he built there an altar, and he called the place El-bethel, for there God had been revealed to him when he fled from before his brother.*

Jacob had been afraid the Canaanites would attack him after Shechem (34:30). God handled it. "The terror of God was on the cities that were around them." This was a terror sent from God. No one chased Jacob's family.

Jacob came to Luz, the old Canaanite name for Bethel, and built an altar. He called it El-bethel, which means the God of Bethel. About thirty years earlier he had named the place Bethel, house of God. Now his focus has moved from the place to the Person, the God who meets us there.

35:8 *And Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, died, and she was buried below Bethel, under the oak; and he called its name Allon-bacuth.*

In the middle of this spiritual high point comes a quiet sorrow. "Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, died." She had come with Rebekah from Haran many years before (24:59). She must have been very old. Somehow she had joined Jacob's household, perhaps after Rebekah's death.

They buried her under an oak and named it Allon-bacuth, oak of weeping. It is striking that Genesis records the nurse's death but never Rebekah's own.

Deborah's life reminds us that faithful servants matter to God. Scripture names a nurse and records the tears shed for her.

35:9-10 *And God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. And God said to him, "Your name **is** Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob again, but Israel shall be your name." And He called his name Israel.*

God "appeared to Jacob again" and "blessed him." He confirmed the new name given at the Jabbok: "Your name shall not be called Jacob again, but Israel shall be your name."

Why repeat it? At Peniel, Jacob received the name in a night of struggle. Here, God confirms it publicly at the place of worship, after Jacob has put away his idols. Shechem had shown that the old Jacob was still alive in him and in his family. God's word to him was firm: you are Israel now. Live like it.

Believers need the same reminder. In Christ we have a new identity (2 Corinthians 5:17). We still struggle with the old self, but God does not take back what He has made us.

35:11-12 *And God said to him, "I **am** God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and an assembly of nations shall be from you, and kings shall come out from your loins. And the land which I gave to Abraham and to Isaac, to you I will give it, and to your seed after you I will give the land."*

"I am God Almighty," El Shaddai, the name God used when He made His covenant with Abraham (17:1).

God then repeats the covenant promises. "Be fruitful and multiply." From Jacob would come "a nation and an assembly of nations," and "kings shall come out from your loins." Israel would one day have kings, and the greatest of them would be Jesus, the Son of David.

The land promise is restated too: "The land which I gave to Abraham and to Isaac, to you I will give it, and to your seed after you." As we saw at 15:18 and 17:8, it rests on God's faithfulness, and He has not taken it back.

35:13-15 *And God went up from him at the place where He had spoken with him. And Jacob set up a pillar at the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured out on it a drink offering, and he poured on it oil. And Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him there Bethel.*

God "went up from him." Jacob set up a stone pillar, "poured out on it a drink offering," and "poured on it oil." A drink offering was wine or another liquid poured out before God as an act of worship. It is the first time a drink offering is mentioned in the Bible. Pouring it out was a way of giving himself and all he had to God.

Then Jacob named the place Bethel again. He had done the same thing about thirty years earlier (28:19). The first time, he was a frightened young man with nothing. Now he is the head of a large household, with a new name and a limp. The place is the same, but Jacob is not. God had kept every promise He made at Bethel.

35:16-18 *And they set out from Bethel, and **there** was still a stretch of the land to go to Ephrath; and Rachel gave birth, and she had hard labor in her giving birth. And it came about, when she was in hard labor in her giving birth, and the midwife said to her, "Do not be afraid, for this also **is** a son for you." And it came about, as her soul was going out, for she died, and she called his name Ben-oni; and his father called him Benjamin.*

They left Bethel and traveled south. Before they reached Ephrath, Rachel went into hard labor. The midwife tried to comfort her: "Do not be afraid, for this also is a son for you." Rachel had prayed for a second son when Joseph was born (30:24), and now he had come.

As she was dying, Rachel named the baby Ben-oni, which means son of my sorrow. Jacob renamed him Benjamin, son of the right hand. The right hand was the place of honor and strength. Jacob would not let his son carry a name of grief all his life. He gave him a name of hope.

Rachel had longed for children, and God gave her two sons. The second one cost her life. Genesis records her death with tenderness, and Jacob never forgot her (48:7).

35:19-20 *And Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath, that **is** Bethlehem. And Jacob set up a pillar over her grave; it **is** the pillar of the grave of Rachel until this day.*

"And Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath, that is Bethlehem." Jacob set up a pillar over her grave. Moses notes that it was still there "until this day."

Bethlehem appears here for the first time in the Bible. Centuries later it would be the town of David and the birthplace of Jesus (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:4-7). Matthew connects Rachel to Bethlehem when he tells of Herod killing the baby boys there. He quotes Jeremiah's picture of Rachel weeping for her children (Matthew 2:17-18; Jeremiah 31:15). Rachel's grave stood near the town where great sorrow and the greatest joy would both come.

35:21-22 *And Israel set out, and he pitched his tent beyond the tower of the flock (Migdal-Eder). And it came about, when Israel dwelt in that land, and Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, the concubine of his father; and Israel heard. And the sons of Jacob were twelve.*

Jacob, now called Israel, moved on "beyond the tower of the flock." Then comes a short and shameful line: "Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, the concubine of his father." Bilhah was Rachel's maid and the mother of Dan and Naphtali. We are not told her side of this. As a servant, she may have had little power to refuse the firstborn son. The sin was Reuben's.

Reuben may have been trying to claim his father's place as head of the family. Later Scripture shows that taking a ruler's concubine could be a way of claiming his authority (2 Samuel 16:21-22). If so, it backfired. Jacob "heard of it," and though he said nothing then, he did not forget. On his deathbed Jacob told Reuben that he would lose the firstborn's place and double share because of this (49:3-4; 1 Chronicles 5:1). Sin has consequences, even when they come years later.

35:23-26 *The sons of Leah: the firstborn of Jacob, Reuben, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun. The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. And the sons of Bilhah, the female servant of Rachel: Dan and Naphtali. And the sons of Zilpah, the female servant of Leah: Gad and Asher. These **are** the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.*

Moses pauses to list Jacob's twelve sons, grouped by their mothers. Leah: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali. Zilpah: Gad and Asher.

These twelve men became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. The family was now complete. In spite of the favoritism, the rivalry and the sin we have seen, God built His nation from these sons. Their names will one day be written on the gates of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:12).

Moses says they "were born to him in Paddan-aram." Benjamin was actually born near Bethlehem. The summary speaks of the family as a whole, most of whom were born in Paddan-aram.

35:27-29 *And Jacob came to Isaac his father **at** Mamre, Kiriath-arba, that **is** Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. And the days of Isaac were a hundred years and eighty years. And Isaac breathed his last and died, and he was gathered to his people, old and satisfied with days; and Esau and Jacob his sons buried him.*

At last Jacob came home "to Isaac his father at Mamre," near Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac had lived. "The days of Isaac were a hundred years and eighty years." He "breathed his last and died, and he was gathered to his people." That phrase speaks of joining those who had died before him, and it hints that death is not the end.

"Esau and Jacob his sons buried him." The two brothers who once fought stood together at their father's grave. That is a quiet sign of the peace God gave them in chapter 33.

Isaac's death is recorded here to close his part of the story, but it may not have happened right away. If we work out the ages, Isaac was still alive when Joseph was sold. Jacob was 130 when he came to Egypt (47:9), and Joseph was 39 then (41:46, plus seven good years and two years of famine), so Jacob was about 108 when seventeen-year-old Joseph was sold. Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born (25:26), so he was about 168 at that time, and he lived to 180. Moses often finishes one person's story before moving on to the next.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:9 (alluded to)

Chapter 35 Summary

God called Jacob to go up to Bethel. Jacob had his household put away their foreign gods and purify themselves, and he buried the idols under an oak near Shechem. God put a terror on the surrounding cities so no one pursued them. At Bethel Jacob built an altar called El-bethel. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried there. God appeared to Jacob, confirmed his name as Israel, revealed Himself as God Almighty, and repeated the promises of nations, kings and the land. Jacob set up a pillar and poured out a drink offering. On the way to Bethlehem, Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin. Reuben sinned with Bilhah. The twelve sons of Jacob are listed, and Isaac died at 180 and was buried by Esau and Jacob.

People and Places

- Bethel (Luz): house of God, where God first met Jacob; Luz was its older Canaanite name.
- El-bethel: the God of Bethel, the name of Jacob's altar.
- Deborah: Rebekah's nurse.
- Allon-bacuth: oak of weeping, where Deborah was buried.
- El Shaddai: God Almighty.
- Ephrath (Bethlehem): the town where Rachel was buried, later the birthplace of David and of Jesus.
- Benjamin: Jacob's twelfth son, the second son of Rachel.
- Mamre and Hebron (Kiriath-arba): where Abraham and Isaac had lived.

Chapter 35 Study Questions

1. Right after Shechem, God called Jacob back to Bethel. Why do you think He chose that place? (35:1; 28:20-22)

2. What did Jacob tell his household to do before going to Bethel? (35:2-4)

3. How did God protect Jacob's family on the journey? (35:5)

4. What name for Himself did God use when He appeared to Jacob, and what did He promise? (35:11-12)

5. How did Rachel die, and what two names were given to her son? (35:16-18)

6. What sin did Reuben commit, and what did it cost him later? (35:22; 49:3-4)

7. In spite of favoritism, rivalry and sin, God built His nation from these twelve sons. What does that tell you about the people God uses? (35:23-26)

8. Who buried Isaac, and why is that meaningful? (35:29)

9. Jacob had to put away foreign gods before going to Bethel. What "idols" might you need to bury in order to draw closer to God?

10. Has God ever called you back to a place where you first met Him? What did that return look like?

Chapter 36: The Descendants of Esau

Scripture

36:1-19 And these ***are*** the generations of Esau, that ***is*** Edom. Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite, and Basemath the daughter of Ishmael, the sister of Nebaioth. And Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, and Basemath bore Reuel, and Oholibamah bore Jeush and Jalam and Korah. These ***are*** the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan. And Esau took his wives and his sons and his daughters and all the souls of his house, and his livestock and all his animals and all his property which he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and he went to a land away from before Jacob his brother. For their property was too great for dwelling together, and the land of their sojournings was not able to bear them because of their livestock. And Esau dwelt in the hill country of Seir; Esau, that ***is*** Edom. And these ***are*** the generations of Esau, the father of Edom, in the hill country of Seir. These ***are*** the names of the sons of Esau: Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, Reuel the son of Basemath the wife of Esau. And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, and Gatam, and Kenaz. And Timna was a concubine to Eliphaz the son of Esau, and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. These ***are*** the sons of Adah the wife of Esau. And these ***are*** the sons of Reuel: Nahath and Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah. These were the sons of Basemath the wife of Esau. And these were the sons of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon, the wife of Esau; and she bore to Esau Jeush and Jalam and Korah. These ***are*** the chiefs of the sons of Esau: the sons of Eliphaz the firstborn of Esau: chief Teman, chief Omar, chief Zepho, chief Kenaz, chief Korah, chief Gatam, chief Amalek. These ***are*** the chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these ***are*** the sons of Adah. And these ***are*** the sons of Reuel the son of Esau: chief Nahath, chief Zerah, chief Shammah, chief Mizzah. These ***are*** the chiefs of Reuel in the land of Edom; these ***are*** the sons of Basemath the wife of Esau. And these ***are*** the sons of Oholibamah the wife of Esau: chief Jeush, chief Jalam, chief Korah. These ***are*** the chiefs of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, the wife of Esau. These ***are*** the sons of Esau, and these ***are*** their chiefs; that ***is*** Edom.

36:20-30 These ***are*** the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan and Shobal and Zibeon and Anah, and Dishon and Ezer and Dishan. These ***are*** the chiefs of the Horites, the sons of Seir, in the land of Edom. And the sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and the sister of Lotan was Timna. And these ***are*** the sons of Shobal: Alvan and Manahath and Ebal, Shepho and Onam. And these ***are*** the sons of Zibeon: both Aiah and Anah. He ***is*** the Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness when he was pasturing the donkeys of Zibeon his father. And these ***are*** the children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah. And these ***are*** the sons of Dishon: Hemdan and Eshban and Ithran and Cheran. These ***are*** the sons of Ezer: Bilhan and Zaavan and Akan. These ***are*** the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran. These ***are*** the chiefs of the Horites: chief Lotan, chief Shobal, chief Zibeon, chief Anah, chief Dishon, chief Ezer, chief Dishan. These ***are*** the chiefs of the Horites, according to their chiefs in the land of Seir.

36:31-43 And these ***are*** the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before a king reigned over the sons of Israel. And Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom, and the name of his city ***was*** Dinhabah. And Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah from Bozrah reigned in his place. And Jobab died, and

Husham from the land of the Temanites reigned in his place. And Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who struck Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his place; and the name of his city ***was*** Avith. And Hadad died, and Samlah from Masrekah reigned in his place. And Samlah died, and Shaul from Rehoboth of the River reigned in his place. And Shaul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his place. And Baal-hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar reigned in his place; and the name of his city ***was*** Pau, and the name of his wife ***was*** Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab. And these ***are*** the names of the chiefs of Esau, according to their clans, according to their places, by their names: chief Timna, chief Alvah, chief Jetheth, chief Oholibamah, chief Elah, chief Pinon, chief Kenaz, chief Teman, chief Mibzar, chief Magdiel, chief Iram. These ***are*** the chiefs of Edom, according to their dwelling places in the land of their possession; that ***is*** Esau, the father of Edom.

Chapter 36 Preview

Before Genesis turns to the story of Joseph, Moses pauses to tie up Esau's line. This chapter is a family record of Esau, also called Edom. It lists his wives and sons, his move away from Jacob to the hill country of Seir, the chiefs who came from his sons and grandsons, the earlier people of Seir called the Horites, and a list of kings who ruled Edom.

A chapter full of names can feel dry, but it carries a message. God keeps His word to everyone He makes a promise to. He told Rebekah that two nations were in her womb (25:23), and He promised Isaac that Esau would have a future (27:39-40). Here we see Esau's family grow into a nation with chiefs and kings. Yet the chapter also reminds us that the line of promise, the line that leads to Christ, runs through Jacob, not Esau.

Chapter 36 Study

36:1-5 *And these **are** the generations of Esau, that **is** Edom. Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite, and Basemath the daughter of Ishmael, the sister of Nebaioth. And Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, and Basemath bore Reuel, and Oholibamah bore Jeush and Jalam and Korah. These **are** the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan.*

The heading "these are the generations" starts a new section, as it did for Ishmael (25:12) and Isaac (25:19). Here it introduces Esau, "that is, Edom." The name Edom means "red," and it goes back to the red stew Esau traded his birthright for (25:30).

Esau married two Canaanite women, Adah and Oholibamah, and Basemath, a daughter of Ishmael. The names here are not the same as those given in 26:34 and 28:9, and Genesis doesn't explain the difference. Some suggest that people then often had more than one name, or that a woman's name could change at marriage. Others think there were more wives than are listed in any one place. What is clear is that Esau married into the Canaanites, which grieved his parents (26:35). He did not value the line of promise.

Esau had five sons born "in the land of Canaan." Like Jacob, he had several wives, though God's pattern from the beginning is one man and one woman (2:24).

36:6-8 *And Esau took his wives and his sons and his daughters and all the souls of his house, and his livestock and all his animals and all his property which he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and he went to a land away from before Jacob his brother. For their property was too great for dwelling together, and the land of their sojournings was not able to bear them because of their livestock. And Esau dwelt in the hill country of Seir; Esau, that* ***is*** *Edom.*

Esau "went to a land away from before Jacob his brother." The reason given is practical: "their property was too great for dwelling together." The land could not support both herds. This repeats what happened between Abraham and Lot (13:6).

So "Esau dwelt in the hill country of Seir," the rugged mountain country south and east of the Dead Sea. The land of Canaan was left to Jacob, just as God had promised. Esau did not fight for it. He simply moved on. In a quiet way, God sorted out who would live where, so that the land of promise went to the heir of promise.

"Esau (that is, Edom)." Moses repeats it so the reader will remember. Edom would become a nation that Israel dealt with for centuries.

36:9-14 *And these* ***are*** *the generations of Esau, the father of Edom, in the hill country of Seir. These* ***are*** *the names of the sons of Esau: Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, Reuel the son of Basemath the wife of Esau. And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, and Gatam, and Kenaz. And Timna was a concubine to Eliphaz the son of Esau, and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. These* ***are*** *the sons of Adah the wife of Esau. And these* ***are*** *the sons of Reuel: Nahath and Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah. These were the sons of Basemath the wife of Esau. And these were the sons of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon, the wife of Esau; and she bore to Esau Jeush and Jalam and Korah.*

Verse 9 repeats the heading, "the generations of Esau," this time for his line in Seir. The list gives his sons and grandsons there and shows "the father of Edom" becoming a people.

One name stands out. Esau's son Eliphaz had a concubine named Timna, and "she bore Amalek to Eliphaz." Amalek became the father of the Amalekites. They were the first nation to attack Israel after the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 17:8-16), and they remained bitter enemies for centuries. A name that looks small here grew into a long and painful story.

Other names will sound familiar to readers of Job. Job's friend Eliphaz was a "Temanite," and Job lived in "the land of Uz" (Job 1:1; 2:11). Teman was Esau's grandson (36:11), and Uz appears among the Horites (36:28). Some think the book of Job is set among these people, but that link is not certain.

36:15-19 *These **are** the chiefs of the sons of Esau: the sons of Eliphaz the firstborn of Esau: chief Teman, chief Omar, chief Zepho, chief Kenaz, chief Korah, chief Gatam, chief Amalek. These **are** the chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these **are** the sons of Adah. And these **are** the sons of Reuel the son of Esau: chief Nahath, chief Zerah, chief Shammah, chief Mizzah. These **are** the chiefs of Reuel in the land of Edom; these **are** the sons of Basemath the wife of Esau. And these **are** the sons of Oholibamah the wife of Esau: chief Jeush, chief Jalam, chief Korah. These **are** the chiefs of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, the wife of Esau. These **are** the sons of Esau, and these **are** their chiefs; that **is** Edom.*

These verses list the "chiefs" descended from Esau. A chief was a clan leader, the head of a family group. The word may also mean the leader of a thousand. Esau's sons and grandsons became the leaders of clans.

Edom became organized and powerful long before Israel did. While Jacob's sons would soon be slaves in Egypt, Esau's sons were already ruling clans in their own land. God's promises do not always look like they are winning. Israel's time would come, but on God's schedule.

36:20-30 *These **are** the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan and Shobal and Zibeon and Anah, and Dishon and Ezer and Dishan. These **are** the chiefs of the Horites, the sons of Seir, in the land of Edom. And the sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and the sister of Lotan was Timna. And these **are** the sons of Shobal: Alvan and Manahath and Ebal, Shepho and Onam. And these **are** the sons of Zibeon: both Aiah and Anah. He **is** the Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness when he was pasturing the donkeys of Zibeon his father. And these **are** the children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah. And these **are** the sons of Dishon: Hemdan and Eshban and Ithran and Cheran. These **are** the sons of Ezer: Bilhan and Zaavan and Akan. These **are** the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran. These **are** the chiefs of the Horites: chief Lotan, chief Shobal, chief Zibeon, chief Anah, chief Dishon, chief Ezer, chief Dishan. These **are** the chiefs of the Horites, according to their chiefs in the land of Seir.*

Moses now lists "the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land." The Horites lived in Seir before Esau came. Deuteronomy tells us that Esau's descendants later drove them out and settled in their place (Deuteronomy 2:12, 22).

Some of Esau's family married into the Horites. Esau's wife Oholibamah was "the daughter of Anah" (36:2, 25), and Eliphaz's concubine Timna was probably the Horite Timna, the sister of Lotan (36:12, 22). The two peoples blended together.

One small detail brings the list to life. Anah was "the Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness when he was pasturing the donkeys of Zibeon his father." Scripture remembers an ordinary man doing an ordinary job who found something useful. It is a reminder that God's Word is rooted in real places and real people.

36:31-39 *And these **are** the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before a king reigned over the sons of Israel. And Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom, and the name of his city **was** Dinhabah. And Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah from Bozrah reigned in his place. And Jobab died, and Husham from the land of the Temanites reigned in his place. And Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who struck Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his place; and the name of his city **was** Avith. And Hadad died, and Samlah from Masrekah reigned in his place. And Samlah died, and Shaul from Rehoboth of the River reigned in his place. And Shaul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his place. And Baal-hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar reigned in his place; and the name of his city **was** Pau, and the name of his wife **was** Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab.*

"These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before a king reigned over the sons of Israel." Edom had kings long before Israel did. Israel's first king, Saul, came centuries later.

This verse raises a question. How could Moses write about a time when Israel had kings? God had already promised Jacob that "kings shall come out from your loins" (35:11), and Moses knew it (Deuteronomy 17:14-15). So Moses could write this looking ahead to what God had promised. Others think a later inspired writer added this note. Either way, it is God's Word.

One thing stands out about these kings. None of them is the son of the king before. Each comes from a different city. Edom's kings seem to have been chosen or to have taken power, not to have passed the throne from father to son. Israel's kings, by contrast, would come through one promised line, the line of David, leading to Jesus Christ.

36:40-43 *And these **are** the names of the chiefs of Esau, according to their clans, according to their places, by their names: chief Timna, chief Alvah, chief Jetheth, chief Oholibamah, chief Elah, chief Pinon, chief Kenaz, chief Teman, chief Mibzar, chief Magdiel, chief Iram. These **are** the chiefs of Edom, according to their dwelling places in the land of their possession; that **is** Esau, the father of Edom.*

The chapter ends with one more list of Edom's chiefs, this time "according to their clans, according to their places." These were the clans and the areas they controlled. The final line sums it up: "These are the chiefs of Edom, according to their dwelling places in the land of their possession; that is Esau, the father of Edom."

Edom had a land and a history, and Israel was told not to detest an Edomite, "for he is your brother" (Deuteronomy 23:7). Yet the story of Edom is a sad one. The Edomites refused Israel passage in the wilderness (Numbers 20:14-21), and the prophet Obadiah condemned their pride and their cruelty toward Jerusalem. King Herod the Great, who tried to kill the baby Jesus, came from Idumea, the later name for Edom.

In Hebrews, Esau is held up as a warning: a man who traded his birthright for a single meal and could not undo it afterward (Hebrews 12:16-17). This chapter shows that Esau gained much of what the world values: land, power, chiefs and kings. But he gave away what mattered most. Jesus asked what it would profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul (Mark 8:36). Moses

now leaves Esau's line behind and turns to Jacob's, because that is where God's plan of salvation goes.

Chapter 36 Summary

Moses records the family of Esau, also called Edom. Esau married Canaanite women and a daughter of Ishmael, and his sons were born in Canaan. Because the brothers' herds were too large for the land, Esau moved away from Jacob to the hill country of Seir. His sons and grandsons are listed, including Amalek, the father of the Amalekites, and they became chiefs of clans in Edom. The chapter also lists the Horites, the earlier people of Seir, some of whom married into Esau's family. It names eight kings who reigned in Edom before any king reigned in Israel, and ends with a list of Edom's chiefs by their regions. God kept His word that Esau would become a nation, while the line of promise continued through Jacob.

People and Places

- Edom: "red," another name for Esau and for the nation that came from him.
- Horites: the people who lived in Seir before Esau's descendants took the land.
- Amalek: Esau's grandson, the father of the Amalekites, later enemies of Israel.
- Teman: Esau's grandson; also a region of Edom.

Chapter 36 Study Questions

1. What is another name for Esau, and where does it come from? (36:1; 25:30)

2. Whom did Esau marry, and why did that trouble his parents? (36:2-3; 26:34-35)

3. Why did Esau move away from Jacob, and where did he go? (36:6-8)

4. Who was Amalek, and why does his name matter later in the Bible? (36:12; Exodus 17:8-16)

5. The Horites lived in Seir before Esau's family took the land. How does Deuteronomy 2:12 compare that with Israel and Canaan? (36:20)

6. Why do you think Genesis bothers to remember Anah finding hot springs? What does that say about the kind of book Genesis is? (36:24)

7. Verse 31 speaks of a time when Israel had kings. How does this study explain that, and which view seems best to you? (36:31)

8. How does this chapter show God keeping His promise about Esau? (25:23)

9. Esau gained land, power and kings but gave up his birthright. What things might tempt us to trade away what matters most to God?

10. God's promises to Israel seemed slow compared to Edom's quick success. How do you stay faithful when God's timing seems slow?

Chapter 37: Joseph Sold into Slavery

Scripture

37:1-11 And Jacob dwelt in the land of the sojournings of his father, in the land of Canaan. These ***are*** the generations of Jacob. Joseph, a son of seventeen years, was shepherding with his brothers among the flock, and he ***was*** a youth with the sons of Bilhah and with the sons of Zilpah, the wives of his father; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. And Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, for he ***was*** a son of old age to him; and he made for him a full-length tunic. And his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, and they hated him, and they were not able to speak to him in peace. And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told to his brothers, and they hated him still more. And he said to them, "Hear, please, this dream which I have dreamed: And look, we ***were*** binding sheaves in the middle of the field, and look, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and look, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf." And his brothers said to him, "Will you really reign over us? Or will you really rule over us?" And they hated him still more for his dreams and for his words. And he dreamed yet another dream, and he recounted it to his brothers, and he said, "Look, I have dreamed a dream again, and look, the sun and the moon and eleven stars ***were*** bowing down to me." And he recounted ***it*** to his father and to his brothers, and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What ***is*** this dream which you have dreamed? Will we really come, I and your mother and your brothers, to bow down to you to the ground?" And his brothers were jealous of him, and his father kept the matter.

37:12-24 And his brothers went to pasture the flock of their father at Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, "Are your brothers not pasturing at Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I ***am***." And he said to him, "Go, please, see the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring me back word." And he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. And a man found him, and look, ***he was*** wandering in the field; and the man asked him, saying, "What are you seeking?" And he said, "I ***am*** seeking my brothers. Tell me, please, where they ***are*** pasturing." And the man said, "They have set out from here, for I heard ***them*** saying, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" And Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. And they saw him from a distance, and before he drew near to them, and they plotted against him to kill him. And they said, each to his brother, "Look, this master of the dreams is coming. And now, come, and let us kill him, and let us throw him into one of the pits, and we will say, 'An evil animal has eaten him'; and we will see what his dreams will be." And Reuben heard, and he rescued him from their hand, and he said, "Let us not strike him ***as to his*** life." And Reuben said to them, "Do not shed blood. Throw him into this pit which ***is*** in the wilderness, and do not stretch out a hand against him," so as to rescue him from their hand, to restore him to his father. And it came about, when Joseph came to his brothers, and they stripped Joseph ***of*** his tunic, the full-length tunic which ***was*** on him. And they took him and threw him into the pit; and the pit ***was*** empty; there ***was*** no water in it.

37:25-36 And they sat down to eat bread, and they lifted up their eyes and saw, and look, a caravan of Ishmaelites ***was*** coming from Gilead, and their camels ***were*** carrying gum and balm and myrrh, going to take ***them*** down to Egypt. And Judah said to his brothers, "What profit ***is there*** if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites,

and let not our hand be on him, for he ***is*** our brother, our flesh." And his brothers listened. And Midianite men, traders, passed by, and they drew and brought up Joseph from the pit, and they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty ***pieces*** of silver; and they brought Joseph to Egypt. And Reuben returned to the pit, and look, Joseph ***was*** not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. And he returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is not ***there***; and I, where am I going?" And they took the tunic of Joseph, and they slaughtered a male goat of ***the*** goats, and they dipped the tunic in the blood. And they sent the full-length tunic, and they brought ***it*** to their father, and they said, "This we have found. Examine, please, whether it ***is*** the tunic of your son or not." And he recognized it, and he said, "***It is*** the tunic of my son. An evil animal has eaten him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces." And Jacob tore his clothes, and he put sackcloth on his loins, and he mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, and he refused to be comforted, and he said, "For I will go down to my son mourning, to Sheol." And his father wept for him. And the Medanites sold him into Egypt to Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh, the commander of the bodyguards.

Chapter 37 Preview

The last great story of Genesis begins here, and it centers on Joseph, Rachel's firstborn son and Jacob's favorite. Jacob shows his love openly with a special robe, and Joseph's brothers hate him for it. Then Joseph has two dreams in which his family bows down to him. When he tells them, the hatred grows.

One day Jacob sends Joseph to check on his brothers, who are far from home with the flocks. When they see him coming, they plot to kill him. Reuben talks them into throwing him into a dry pit instead, and Judah suggests selling him to traders headed for Egypt. The brothers dip Joseph's tunic in goat's blood and let their father believe a wild animal killed him. Jacob is crushed. But the chapter ends with a quiet hint that God is still at work: Joseph is alive in Egypt, in the house of an officer of Pharaoh.

Chapter 37 Study

37:1-2 *And Jacob dwelt in the land of the sojournings of his father, in the land of Canaan. These **are** the generations of Jacob. Joseph, a son of seventeen years, was shepherding with his brothers among the flock, and he **was** a youth with the sons of Bilhah and with the sons of Zilpah, the wives of his father; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.*

"And Jacob dwelt in the land of the sojournings of his father." Isaac had lived in Canaan as a foreigner. Now Jacob does too. The land was promised but not yet possessed.

"These are the generations of Jacob." This heading starts the final section of Genesis. It is Jacob's family story, but the spotlight falls on Joseph, who was "a son of seventeen years."

Joseph worked with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, and he "brought a bad report of them to their father." We aren't told what the report was, or whether Joseph was being faithful or just telling tales. Either way, it did not help his standing with his brothers.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:9 (alluded to)

37:3-4 *And Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, for he **was** a son of old age to him; and he made for him a full-length tunic. And his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, and they hated him, and they were not able to speak to him in peace.*

"Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, for he was a son of old age to him." Joseph was the firstborn of Rachel, the wife Jacob loved. Jacob made him "a full-length tunic," a long robe with sleeves. Older translations call it a coat of many colors. Either way, it was not work clothing. It was a garment of honor, perhaps a sign that Jacob meant Joseph to have the place of the firstborn, since Reuben had lost it (35:22; 1 Chronicles 5:1-2).

Favoritism runs through this family like a crack in a wall. Isaac loved Esau more. Rebekah loved Jacob more. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, and now Joseph more than his brothers. The bitter fruit shows at once: "they hated him, and they were not able to speak to him in peace." We saw where this leads in Isaac's home (25:28), and now it repeats in Jacob's.

37:5-8 *And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told **it** to his brothers, and they hated him still more. And he said to them, "Hear, please, this dream which I have dreamed: And look, we **were** binding sheaves in the middle of the field, and look, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and look, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf." And his brothers said to him, "Will you really reign over us? Or will you really rule over us?" And they hated him still more for his dreams and for his words.*

Then Joseph had a dream. He and his brothers were binding sheaves of grain in the field, and his sheaf stood up while theirs "gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf."

The brothers understood it immediately: "Will you really reign over us?" They "hated him still more for his dreams and for his words."

Was Joseph wrong to tell the dream? He may have been young and unwise in how he shared it. But the dream itself came from God. Years later, the brothers would bow down to Joseph in Egypt, just as the dream said (42:6). God was revealing His plan, even though no one, including Joseph, understood how it would come to pass.

37:9-11 *And he dreamed yet another dream, and he recounted it to his brothers, and he said, "Look, I have dreamed a dream again, and look, the sun and the moon and eleven stars **were** bowing down to me." And he recounted **it** to his father and to his brothers, and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What **is** this dream which you have dreamed? Will we really come, I and your mother and your brothers, to bow down to you to the ground?" And his brothers were jealous of him, and his father kept the matter.*

Joseph had a second dream: "the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." This time his father was included. Jacob rebuked him: "Will we really come, I and your mother and your brothers, to bow down to you to the ground?"

In Scripture, when God gives a dream twice, it means the matter is settled (41:32). Joseph would later explain two dreams for Pharaoh's officials, and two dreams for Pharaoh himself. God was firmly establishing what He would do.

The brothers "were jealous of him, and his father kept the matter." Jacob scolded his son outwardly, but inwardly he wondered whether God was speaking. That is similar to Mary, who "was treasuring up all these declarations, pondering them in her heart" about her Son (Luke 2:19).

37:12-17 *And his brothers went to pasture the flock of their father at Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, "Are your brothers not pasturing at Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I **am**." And he said to him, "Go, please, see the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring me back word." And he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. And a man found him, and look, **he was** wandering in the field; and the man asked him, saying, "What are you seeking?" And he said, "I **am** seeking my brothers. Tell me, please, where they **are** pasturing." And the man said, "They have set out from here, for I heard **them** saying, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" And Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.*

The brothers took the flocks north to Shechem, about fifty miles from Hebron. Shechem was where Simeon and Levi had killed the men of the city (chapter 34). Jacob may have been worried. He sent Joseph to "see the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock."

Joseph answered, "I will go." He obeyed his father even though it meant going to brothers who hated him.

When Joseph got to Shechem, they were not there. A stranger found him "wandering in the field" and told him they had gone on to Dothan, about fifteen miles farther north. This little detail matters. If that man had not been there, Joseph would have gone home. God's guiding hand is often hidden in small moments like this one.

Many see in Joseph a picture of Christ. Like Joseph, Jesus was the beloved Son, sent by His Father to His brothers, and when He came to His own, "His own people did not receive Him" (John 1:11). The New Testament never calls Joseph a type of Christ in so many words, but the parallels throughout his story are striking.

37:18-20 *And they saw him from a distance, and before he drew near to them, and they plotted against him to kill him. And they said, each to his brother, "Look, this master of the dreams is coming. And now, come, and let us kill him, and let us throw him into one of the pits, and we will say, 'An evil animal has eaten him'; and we will see what his dreams will be."*

The brothers "saw him from a distance," probably recognizing that robe, and "they plotted against him to kill him." Hatred that had simmered for years boiled over.

"Look, this master of the dreams is coming," they said to each other. Their plan was simple and evil: kill him, throw him into a pit, and say, "An evil animal has eaten him." Then, they said, "we will see what his dreams will be."

That last line is full of irony. The brothers thought they could stop God's plan by getting rid of the dreamer. Every step they took to stop the dreams moved the dreams closer to coming true. People cannot cancel what God has decided. We make many plans, but "the counsel of the LORD, it will stand" (Proverbs 19:21).

37:21-24 *And Reuben heard, and he rescued him from their hand, and he said, "Let us not strike him **as to his** life." And Reuben said to them, "Do not shed blood. Throw him into this pit which **is** in the wilderness, and do not stretch out a hand against him," so as to rescue him from their hand, to restore him to his father. And it came about, when Joseph came to his brothers, and they stripped Joseph **of** his tunic, the full-length tunic which **was** on him. And they took him and threw him into the pit; and the pit **was** empty; there **was** no water in it.*

Reuben stepped in. "Let us not strike him as to his life." He suggested throwing Joseph into a dry pit, secretly planning to come back and "to restore him to his father." As the firstborn, Reuben was responsible for his younger brothers, and maybe he was also trying to win back his father's favor after his sin with Bilhah.

The brothers "stripped Joseph of his tunic," the very symbol of their father's love, and threw him into the pit. It was "empty; there was no water in it." Pits like this were cisterns, holes cut in rock to catch rainwater. A dry one could become a prison or a grave.

Years later, the brothers remembered what they had ignored that day: "we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us for favor, and we did not listen" (42:21). Joseph begged. They did not care.

37:25-28 *And they sat down to eat bread, and they lifted up their eyes and saw, and look, a caravan of Ishmaelites **was** coming from Gilead, and their camels **were** carrying gum and balm and myrrh, going to take **them** down to Egypt. And Judah said to his brothers, "What profit **is there** if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be on him, for he **is** our brother, our flesh." And his brothers listened. And Midianite men, traders, passed by, and they drew and brought up Joseph from the pit, and they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty **pieces** of silver; and they brought Joseph to Egypt.*

Then they "sat down to eat bread." While their brother cried out from the pit, they ate. That shows how hard their hearts had become.

A caravan of Ishmaelites came by, carrying spices to Egypt. Judah spoke up: "What profit is there if we kill our brother?" He suggested selling Joseph instead, "for he is our brother, our flesh." It sounds like mercy, but it was still a terrible sin. He traded his brother's life for money. The Law of Moses would later make kidnapping and selling a person a crime punished by death (Exodus 21:16).

They sold Joseph "for twenty pieces of silver." That was the value the Law later set for a boy of Joseph's age (Leviticus 27:5), and some scholars note that it matches slave prices known from texts of the early second millennium B.C. The text calls the traders both Ishmaelites and Midianites. The two groups were related (both came from Abraham, 16:15; 25:2), and the names seem to have been used loosely for desert traders. Some think a Midianite group traveled with the Ishmaelite caravan.

Many have noticed that Judah, whose name comes into the line of Jesus, sold his brother for silver, and that centuries later Judas (the Greek form of Judah) sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-16). The New Testament doesn't draw that line itself, but the echo is hard to miss.

New Testament links: Acts 7:9 (alluded to)

37:29-30 *And Reuben returned to the pit, and look, Joseph **was** not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. And he returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is not **there**; and I, where am I going?"*

Reuben came back to the pit and found it empty. He "tore his clothes," a sign of deep grief. "The boy is not there; and I, where am I going?"

Reuben's plan to rescue Joseph failed. His words show more worry about himself than about Joseph: "And I, where am I going?" As the oldest, he would have to answer to his father. Reuben meant well, but he lacked the courage to stand openly against his brothers. Good intentions without courage are not enough.

37:31-35 *And they took the tunic of Joseph, and they slaughtered a male goat of **the** goats, and they dipped the tunic in the blood. And they sent the full-length tunic, and they brought **it** to their father, and they said, "This we have found. Examine, please, whether it **is** the tunic of your son or not." And he recognized it, and he said, "**It is** the tunic of my son. An evil animal has eaten him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces." And Jacob tore his clothes, and he put sackcloth on his loins, and he mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, and he refused to be comforted, and he said, "For I will go down to my son mourning, to Sheol." And his father wept for him.*

Then the cover-up. They killed a goat, dipped Joseph's robe in its blood, and sent it to Jacob. "This we have found. Examine, please, whether it is the tunic of your son or not." They let their father draw his own wrong conclusion.

There is a painful echo here. Years earlier, Jacob deceived his own father Isaac using goat skins and his brother's clothes (27:9-16). Now his sons deceive him using a goat and their brother's clothes. We reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7).

Jacob said, "Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!" He tore his clothes, wore sackcloth, a rough cloth worn in mourning, and mourned "many days." His children tried to comfort him, but "he refused to be comforted." He said he would go down to Sheol mourning. Sheol is the Hebrew word for the grave, the place of the dead.

The sons watched their father's grief and kept their secret for more than twenty years. Sin hidden does not stay small. It weighs on a family for years.

37:36 *And the Medanites sold him into Egypt to Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh, the commander of the bodyguards.*

The last verse of the chapter changes everything. Jacob was mourning a son he thought was dead, but Joseph was alive in Egypt. He was sold to Potiphar, "an official of Pharaoh, the commander of the bodyguards."

The brothers thought they were done with Joseph. Jacob thought he had lost him. But God had not lost track of him. Joseph's story is a long lesson in what he himself would say at the end: "you planned evil against me; God planned it for good" (50:20). When everything looks lost, God is often doing His most important work behind the scenes.

Chapter 37 Summary

Jacob lived in Canaan, and Joseph, at seventeen, tended the flocks with his brothers. Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons and gave him a full-length tunic, so his brothers hated him. Joseph dreamed that his brothers' sheaves bowed to his, and that the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed to him, and his brothers hated him even more. Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers, and he found them at Dothan. They plotted to kill him, but Reuben convinced them to throw him into a dry pit. Then, at Judah's suggestion, they sold him to a caravan of traders for twenty pieces of silver. They dipped his tunic in goat's blood, and Jacob believed a wild animal had killed Joseph and mourned deeply. Meanwhile, Joseph was sold in Egypt to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard.

People and Places

- Joseph: the eleventh son of Jacob and the firstborn of Rachel.
- Dothan: a town north of Shechem where the brothers sold Joseph.
- Ishmaelites and Midianites: desert traders descended from Abraham through Ishmael and through Midian.
- Sheol: the Hebrew word for the grave, the place of the dead.
- Potiphar: an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard.

Chapter 37 Study Questions

1. How old was Joseph when this story begins, and what did he report to his father? (37:2)

2. Why did Joseph's brothers hate him? How much of the blame belongs to Jacob, and how much to Joseph? (37:2-4)

3. What were Joseph's two dreams, and how did his family react? (37:5-11)

4. A stranger happened to find Joseph wandering and pointed him to Dothan. Where do you see God's hidden hand in small moments like this one? (37:12-17)

5. The brothers said, "we will see what his dreams will be." How did their plan end up serving the very dreams they hated? (37:18-20; 42:6)

6. How did Reuben and Judah each try to change the plan? (37:21-22, 26-27)

7. How did the brothers deceive their father, and how does this echo Jacob's past? (37:31-33; 27:9-16)

8. Where was Joseph at the end of the chapter? (37:36)

9. Favoritism did great harm in Jacob's family. Where might you be showing favoritism, at home, at work or at church?

10. Joseph was alive while his father thought he was dead. When has God been at work in your life when it looked like all was lost?

Chapter 38: Judah and Tamar

Scripture

38:1-11 And it came about at that time, and Judah went down from his brothers, and he turned aside to an Adullamite man, and his name ***was*** Hirah. And Judah saw there the daughter of a Canaanite man, and his name ***was*** Shua; and he took her and went in to her. And she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. And she conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. And she yet again bore a son, and she called his name Shelah; and he was in Chezib when she bore him. And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name ***was*** Tamar. And Er, the firstborn of Judah, was evil in the eyes of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death. And Judah said to Onan, "Go in to the wife of your brother, and perform the duty of a husband's brother for her, and raise up seed for your brother." And Onan knew that the seed would not be his; and it came about, whenever he went in to the wife of his brother, and he wasted ***it*** on the ground, so as not to give seed to his brother. And what he did was evil in the eyes of the LORD, and He put him to death also. And Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Dwell ***as*** a widow ***at*** the house of your father until Shelah my son grows up"; for he said, "Lest he also die like his brothers." And Tamar went and dwelt ***at*** the house of her father.

38:12-23 And the days increased, and the daughter of Shua, the wife of Judah, died; and Judah was comforted, and he went up to the shearers of his sheep, he and Hirah his friend the Adullamite, to Timnah. And it was told to Tamar, saying, "Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." And she removed the clothes of her widowhood from on her, and she covered ***herself*** with the veil and wrapped herself up, and she sat at the entrance of Enaim, which ***is*** on the road to Timnah; for she had seen that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife. And Judah saw her and considered her a prostitute, for she had covered her face. And he turned aside to her by the road, and he said, "Come, please, let me go in to you"; for he did not know that she ***was*** his daughter-in-law. And she said, "What will you give me, that you may go in to me?" And he said, "I, I will send a kid of ***the*** goats from the flock." And she said, "If you will give a pledge until you send ***it***." And he said, "What ***is*** the pledge that I shall give you?" And she said, "Your seal and your cord and your staff that ***is*** in your hand." And he gave ***them*** to her, and he went in to her, and she conceived by him. And she arose and went, and she removed her veil from on her, and she put on the clothes of her widowhood. And Judah sent the kid of the goats by the hand of his friend the Adullamite to take the pledge from the hand of the woman; and he did not find her. And he asked the men of her place, saying, "Where ***is*** the cult prostitute, she ***who was*** at Enaim by the road?" And they said, "***There*** has been no cult prostitute in this ***place***." And he returned to Judah and said, "I did not find her; and also the men of the place said, '***There*** has been no cult prostitute in this ***place***.'" And Judah said, "Let her take ***them*** for herself, lest we become ***an object of*** contempt. Look, I sent this kid, and you, you did not find her."

38:24-30 And it came about, about three months ***later***, and it was told to Judah, saying, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the prostitute, and also, look, she ***is*** pregnant by prostitution." And Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned." She ***was*** being brought out, and she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "By the man to whom these ***belong***, I ***am*** pregnant." And she said, "Examine, please, to whom ***belong*** these, the seal and the cords and the staff." And Judah

recognized ***them***, and he said, "She is more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son." And he did not know her again. And it came about at the time of her giving birth, and look, twins ***were*** in her womb. And it came about, when she was giving birth, and he put out a hand; and the midwife took and tied on his hand a scarlet ***thread***, saying, "This one came out first." And it came about, as he drew back his hand, and look, his brother came out; and she said, "What a breach you have broken through for yourself!" And he called his name Perez. And afterward his brother came out, on whose hand ***was*** the scarlet ***thread***; and he called his name Zerah.

Chapter 38 Preview

Right after Joseph is sold into Egypt, Genesis turns aside to tell a hard story about his brother Judah. Judah leaves his family, marries a Canaanite woman, and has three sons. His oldest son marries a woman named Tamar but dies because of his wickedness. The second son refuses his duty to give Tamar a child, and he dies too. Judah promises Tamar his third son but never keeps his word.

Tamar, left a childless widow, takes a desperate step. She disguises herself, and Judah, thinking she is a prostitute, sleeps with her and leaves his seal, cord and staff as a pledge. When Tamar is found to be pregnant, Judah orders her burned, until she produces his belongings. Judah admits, "She is more righteous than I." Tamar gives birth to twins, and one of them, Perez, becomes an ancestor of King David and of Jesus Christ. The chapter shows God's grace working through a broken family.

Chapter 38 Study

38:1-5 *And it came about at that time, and Judah went down from his brothers, and he turned aside to an Adullamite man, and his name **was** Hirah. And Judah saw there the daughter of a Canaanite man, and his name **was** Shua; and he took her and went in to her. And she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. And she conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. And she yet again bore a son, and she called his name Shelah; and he was in Chezib when she bore him.*

"At that time," while Joseph was being carried off to Egypt, "Judah went down from his brothers." He settled near a man of Adullam named Hirah and married the daughter of a Canaanite named Shua.

This was a step away from God's people. Abraham and Isaac had worked hard to keep their sons from marrying Canaanites (24:3; 28:1). Judah walked right into it. Maybe he left because of guilt over Joseph, or because he could no longer stand to watch his father's grief. Genesis doesn't say. But Judah drifted from his family and from the ways of God.

Judah had three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah. On the surface it looked like a normal family life. Under the surface, trouble was growing.

38:6-7 *And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name **was** Tamar. And Er, the firstborn of Judah, was evil in the eyes of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death.*

Judah found a wife for Er, his firstborn. Her name was Tamar. Then comes a short and sobering line: "Er, the firstborn of Judah, was evil in the eyes of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death."

We aren't told what Er did, only that it was evil enough that God judged him directly. God is patient, but He is also holy, and He does not ignore sin forever.

38:8-10 *And Judah said to Onan, "Go in to the wife of your brother, and perform the duty of a husband's brother for her, and raise up seed for your brother." And Onan knew that the seed would not be his; and it came about, whenever he went in to the wife of his brother, and he wasted **it** on the ground, so as not to give seed to his brother. And what he did was evil in the eyes of the LORD, and He put him to death also.*

Judah's words in verse 8 show a custom already in place: when a man died without a son, his brother was expected to marry the widow and give her a son. That child would carry on the dead brother's name and inherit his share. God later made this part of the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 25:5-6), and it is called levirate marriage, from a Latin word for "brother-in-law." It protected widows and kept a family line from dying out.

Judah told Onan to "perform the duty of a husband's brother for her." Onan went through the motions, but he made sure Tamar would not conceive. He "knew that the seed would not be his." If Er had no heir, Onan would get a bigger share of the inheritance. Onan was willing to use Tamar but not to provide for her or his brother's line. It was selfishness and deceit wrapped up together.

"What he did was evil in the eyes of the LORD, and He put him to death also." Onan's sin was not only what he did with his body but his greedy refusal to care for his brother's widow and his brother's name.

New Testament links: Matthew 22:24 (alluded to); Mark 12:19 (alluded to); Luke 20:28 (alluded to)

38:11 *And Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Dwell **as** a widow **at** the house of your father until Shelah my son grows up"; for he said, "Lest he also die like his brothers." And Tamar went and dwelt **at** the house of her father.*

Judah now had one son left, Shelah. He told Tamar, "Dwell as a widow at the house of your father until Shelah my son grows up." But Moses lets us see Judah's real thought: "lest he also die like his brothers."

Judah blamed Tamar for his sons' deaths, when it was their own sin that caused them. He made a promise he never meant to keep. Tamar went home, a widow without a husband, without a child and without a future. A woman in her place had little protection. Judah should have cared for her. Instead he sent her away.

38:12-14 *And the days increased, and the daughter of Shua, the wife of Judah, died; and Judah was comforted, and he went up to the shearers of his sheep, he and Hirah his friend the Adullamite, to Timnah. And it was told to Tamar, saying, "Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." And she removed the clothes of her widowhood from on her, and she covered **herself** with the veil and wrapped herself up, and she sat at the entrance of Enaim, which **is** on the road to Timnah; for she had seen that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife.*

Time passed. Judah's wife died. After mourning, Judah went up to Timnah for sheep-shearing, a time of feasting and celebration, with his friend Hirah.

Tamar heard about it, and she saw that "Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife." Judah's promise had been broken. So she took off her widow's clothes, put on a veil, and sat by the road at Enaim, where Judah would pass.

It seems she was determined to have a child from Judah's family, the line she had married into, since Judah had shut every honest door. Her plan was wrong, but her situation was one Judah had created.

38:15-18 *And Judah saw her and considered her a prostitute, for she had covered her face. And he turned aside to her by the road, and he said, "Come, please, let me go in to you"; for he did not know that she **was** his daughter-in-law. And she said, "What will you give me, that you may go in to me?" And he said, "I, I will send a kid of **the** goats from the flock." And she said, "If you will give a pledge until you send **it**." And he said, "What **is** the pledge that I shall give you?" And she said, "Your seal and your cord and your staff that **is** in your hand." And he gave **them** to her, and he went in to her, and she conceived by him.*

Judah saw a veiled woman by the road and "considered her a prostitute." He did not know she was his daughter-in-law. He asked to sleep with her, and she asked what he would pay. He offered a young goat, and she asked for a pledge until it came: "Your seal and your cord and your staff."

A seal was a small carved stone, often worn on a cord around the neck, used to stamp a man's mark into clay. It was like a signature or ID card. The staff may also have been carved with his mark. Judah handed over the things that proved who he was, and he slept with her, "and she conceived by him."

The Bible tells this plainly so we can see how far Judah had fallen. He was a widower, away from home, and he gave in to temptation without a second thought. Paul warns us to "flee sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18). Judah did the opposite.

38:19-23 *And she arose and went, and she removed her veil from on her, and she put on the clothes of her widowhood. And Judah sent the kid of the goats by the hand of his friend the Adullamite to take the pledge from the hand of the woman; and he did not find her. And he asked the men of her place, saying, "Where **is** the cult prostitute, she **who was** at Enaim by the road?" And they said, "**There** has been no cult prostitute in this **place**." And he returned to Judah and said, "I did not find her; and also the men of the place said, '**There** has been no cult prostitute in this **place**.'" And Judah said, "Let her take **them** for herself, lest we become **an object of** contempt. Look, I sent this kid, and you, you did not find her."*

Tamar went home and put her widow's clothes back on. Judah sent his friend Hirah with the goat to get back his pledge. Hirah asked the local men, "Where is the cult prostitute?" The word he used is different from the one in verse 15. It is related to the Hebrew word for "holy," and it is usually understood as a woman attached in some way to a pagan shrine. Older books often said ritual sex was part of Canaanite religion, but many scholars today question how common that was. Either way, Hirah may have used the more respectable word to make Judah's errand sound better.

"There has been no cult prostitute in this place." Judah decided to drop it. "Let her take them for herself," he said, "lest we become an object of contempt." He worried more about his reputation than about his sin. Judah had wanted to hide what he did. He was about to learn that sin does not stay hidden (Numbers 32:23).

38:24-26 *And it came about, about three months **later**, and it was told to Judah, saying, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the prostitute, and also, look, she **is** pregnant by prostitution." And Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned." She **was** being brought out, and she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "By the man to whom these **belong**, I **am** pregnant." And she said, "Examine, please, to whom **belong** these, the seal and the cords and the staff." And Judah recognized **them**, and he said, "She is more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son." And he did not know her again.*

Three months later, Judah heard that Tamar "has played the prostitute, and also, look, she is pregnant." His answer was quick and harsh: "Bring her out, and let her be burned." Judah, who had just slept with someone he thought was a prostitute, now demanded death for Tamar's sin. It is easy to be strict with others and easy on ourselves. Jesus warned about seeing the speck in our brother's eye and missing the log in our own (Matthew 7:3-5).

As she was being brought out, Tamar sent Judah his seal, cord and staff. "By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant." And she said, "Examine, please, to whom belong these." Those same words were used when the brothers brought Jacob the bloody tunic (37:32). Judah had once asked his father to "examine" a piece of evidence to cover a lie. Now he is asked to examine evidence that uncovers the truth about himself.

Judah recognized them. Then he said one of the most important sentences of his life: "She is more righteous than I." He confessed publicly. He admitted that he had wronged Tamar by not giving her to Shelah. Here Judah's life turns a corner. Later in Genesis, the man who sold his brother will

offer himself as a slave in place of his brother Benjamin (44:33). God was beginning to change him here.

38:27-30 *And it came about at the time of her giving birth, and look, twins **were** in her womb. And it came about, when she was giving birth, and he put out a hand; and the midwife took and tied on his hand a scarlet **thread**, saying, "This one came out first." And it came about, as he drew back his hand, and look, his brother came out; and she said, "What a breach you have broken through for yourself!" And he called his name Perez. And afterward his brother came out, on whose hand **was** the scarlet **thread**; and he called his name Zerah.*

Tamar gave birth to twins. During the birth one baby put out his hand, and the midwife "took and tied on his hand a scarlet thread," saying, "This one came out first." But he pulled his hand back, and his brother came out first. "What a breach you have broken through for yourself!" So he was named Perez, which means breach, or breaking through. The other was named Zerah.

Once again in Genesis, the younger takes the place of the older, as with Jacob and Esau. And Perez is the one God chose. Perez became the ancestor of Boaz, of King David, and of Jesus (Ruth 4:18-22; Matthew 1:3).

That is the most surprising thing about this chapter. Matthew names Tamar in the family tree of Jesus. Out of a story of sin, deception and shame, God brought the line of the Messiah. Jesus did not come from a spotless family. He came from families like Judah's, and like ours, to save sinners. God's grace is greater than our worst chapters. That does not make the sin right, but it shows how great God's mercy is.

Chapter 38 Summary

Judah left his brothers and married a Canaanite woman, who bore him three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah. Er married Tamar, but he was wicked, and the LORD took his life. Onan was told to give Tamar a child for his brother, but he refused, and the LORD took his life too. Judah sent Tamar home to wait for Shelah but never gave her to him. After Judah's wife died, Tamar disguised herself by the road, and Judah, thinking she was a prostitute, slept with her and left his seal, cord and staff as a pledge. When Tamar was found to be pregnant, Judah ordered her burned, but she produced his belongings, and Judah confessed, "She is more righteous than I." Tamar gave birth to twins, Perez and Zerah. Perez became an ancestor of King David and of Jesus.

People and Places

- Hirah the Adullamite: Judah's friend from the town of Adullam.
- Tamar: the widow of Judah's son Er, later the mother of Perez and Zerah.
- Er, Onan and Shelah: Judah's three sons by the daughter of Shua.
- Timnah and Enaim: towns in the hill country where Judah went for sheep-shearing.
- Levirate marriage: the custom of a brother marrying his dead brother's widow to give her a son.

- Perez: Tamar's son, an ancestor of David and of Jesus.

Chapter 38 Study Questions

1. What did Judah do after Joseph was sold, and why was it a step away from God's ways? (38:1-2)

2. What happened to Er and to Onan, and why? (38:7-10)

3. What promise did Judah make to Tamar, and why didn't he keep it? (38:11, 14)

4. Tamar's plan was wrong, but her situation was one Judah had created. How do you weigh her actions against his? (38:11-16, 26)

5. What did Judah leave with Tamar as a pledge? (38:17-18)

6. Judah decided to let the matter drop, "lest we become an object of contempt." What does that show about what he cared about most? (38:20-23)

7. Judah ordered Tamar burned, then said, "She is more righteous than I." Why is that confession a turning point for him? (38:24-26; 44:33)

8. Who were Tamar's sons, and why does Perez matter? (38:29; Matthew 1:3)

9. Judah was harsh toward Tamar's sin while ignoring his own. Where are you tempted to judge others more strictly than yourself?

10. God placed Tamar in the family line of Jesus. What does this tell you about God's grace toward people with a broken past?

Chapter 39: Joseph in Potiphar's House

Scripture

39:1-6 And Joseph had been brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh, the commander of the bodyguards, an Egyptian man, bought him from the hand of the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD ***was*** with him, and all that he ***was*** doing the LORD ***was*** making successful in his hand. And Joseph found favor in his eyes, and he served him; and he appointed him over his house, and all that he had he gave into his hand. And it came about, from ***the time*** he appointed him in his house and over all that he had, and the LORD blessed the house of the Egyptian on account of Joseph; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in the house and in the field. And he left all that he had in the hand of Joseph, and he did not know anything with him except the bread which he ***was*** eating. And Joseph was handsome of form and handsome of appearance.

39:7-18 And it came about after these things, and the wife of his master lifted up her eyes to Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." And he refused, and he said to the wife of his master, "Look, my master does not know with me what ***is*** in the house, and all that he has he has given into my hand. He ***is*** not greater in this house than I, and he has not withheld from me anything except you, because you ***are*** his wife. And how shall I do this great evil, and sin against God?" And it came about, as she spoke to Joseph day ***by*** day, and he did not listen to her, to lie beside her, to be with her. And it came about on this day, and he went into the house to do his work, and not anyone of the men of the house ***was*** there in the house. And she seized him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." And he left his garment in her hand, and he fled and went outside. And it came about, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, and she called out to the men of her house, and she said to them, saying, "See, he has brought to us a Hebrew man to mock us. He came to me to lie with me, and I called out with a great voice. And it came about, when he heard that I raised my voice and called out, and he left his garment beside me, and he fled and went outside." And she placed his garment beside her until his master came to his house. And she spoke to him according to these words, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you brought to us, came to me to mock me. And it came about, when I raised my voice and called out, and he left his garment beside me and fled outside."

39:19-23 And it came about, when his master heard the words of his wife which she spoke to him, saying, "According to these things your servant did to me," and his anger burned. And the master of Joseph took him, and he put him into the prison house, the place where the prisoners of the king ***were*** confined; and he was there in the prison house. And the LORD was with Joseph, and He extended steadfast love to him, and He gave him favor in the eyes of the commander of the prison house. And the commander of the prison house gave into the hand of Joseph all the prisoners who ***were*** in the prison house; and all that they ***were*** doing there, he was ***the one*** doing ***it***. The commander of the prison house ***was*** not seeing anything at all in his hand, because the LORD ***was*** with him; and what he ***was*** doing, the LORD ***was*** making successful.

Chapter 39 Preview

Chapter 38 showed Judah giving in to temptation. Chapter 39 shows his younger brother Joseph standing firm against it. Joseph is now a slave in Egypt, bought by Potiphar, a high officer of Pharaoh. Yet one phrase rings through the chapter: "the LORD was with Joseph." God blesses everything Joseph touches, and Potiphar puts him in charge of his whole household.

Then Potiphar's wife tries again and again to seduce Joseph. He refuses, saying he will not sin against God. One day she grabs his garment, and he runs, leaving it in her hand. She uses it to accuse him falsely, and Joseph is thrown into prison. But even in prison, the LORD is with Joseph, and the jailer puts him in charge of everything. Doing right does not always bring quick rewards, but it never takes us out of God's care.

Chapter 39 Study

39:1 *And Joseph had been brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh, the commander of the bodyguards, an Egyptian man, bought him from the hand of the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.*

The story picks up where chapter 37 left off. Joseph "had been brought down to Egypt." Potiphar, "an official of Pharaoh, the commander of the bodyguards," bought him from the traders.

Picture Joseph's situation. He was about seventeen, in a strange land with a strange language and strange gods. He had been betrayed by his own brothers and sold like an animal. He had every reason to be bitter.

Genesis does not name the Pharaoh of this time. Many scholars place Joseph in Egypt somewhere in the early second millennium B.C., but the dates are debated. What matters is not which Pharaoh it was, but which God was watching over Joseph.

39:2-3 *And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD **was** with him, and all that he **was** doing the LORD **was** making successful in his hand.*

"The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man." Look at where Joseph was when this was said. He was not free. He was not home. He was a slave in his master's house. Yet God was with him.

We often think God's presence means comfortable circumstances. Joseph's life shows otherwise. God's presence does not always change where we are. It changes who we are and what happens through us there.

Even Potiphar, a pagan Egyptian, "saw that the LORD was with him." Joseph's faith showed in his work. People around us should be able to see God's hand in the way we do our jobs. Paul told slaves in his day to work "in sincerity of heart, fearing God" (Colossians 3:22). Joseph did that long before Paul wrote it.

New Testament links: Acts 7:9 (alluded to)

39:4-6 *And Joseph found favor in his eyes, and he served him; and he appointed him over his house, and all that he had he gave into his hand. And it came about, from* ***the time*** *he appointed him in his house and over all that he had, and the LORD blessed the house of the Egyptian on account of Joseph; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in the house and in the field. And he left all that he had in the hand of Joseph, and he did not know anything with him except the bread which he* ***was*** *eating. And Joseph was handsome of form and handsome of appearance.*

Joseph "served him; and he appointed him over his house, and all that he had he gave into his hand." Joseph was now the manager of all the other servants and the master's property.

Then "the LORD blessed the house of the Egyptian on account of Joseph." This is God's promise to Abraham in action: "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (12:3). An Egyptian household was blessed because a son of Abraham lived there. Laban's household had been blessed because of Jacob in the same way (30:27).

Potiphar trusted Joseph so completely that he did not think about anything "except the bread which he was eating." Then Moses adds a detail that sets up the next scene: "Joseph was handsome of form and handsome of appearance." Success and good looks are gifts, but they can also bring temptation.

39:7-9 *And it came about after these things, and the wife of his master lifted up her eyes to Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." And he refused, and he said to the wife of his master, "Look, my master does not know with me what* ***is*** *in the house, and all that he has he has given into my hand. He* ***is*** *not greater in this house than I, and he has not withheld from me anything except you, because you* ***are*** *his wife. And how shall I do this great evil, and sin against God?"*

"The wife of his master lifted up her eyes to Joseph," and she said, "Lie with me." Her words were blunt. Joseph was young, far from home, and a slave. Saying yes would have been easy, and saying no was dangerous. She had power over him.

"And he refused." Joseph gave his reasons. First, his master trusted him with everything. Betraying that trust would be wrong. Second, "he has not withheld from me anything except you, because you are his wife." Joseph honored marriage. Third, and most important: "How shall I do this great evil, and sin against God?"

Joseph saw that sin is first and most of all against God. David said the same after his sin with Bathsheba: "Against You, You alone, I have sinned" (Psalm 51:4). Joseph lived in a land where no one knew his God, yet he lived as if God were watching, because He was. Integrity means being the same person when no one is looking.

39:10 *And it came about, as she spoke to Joseph day **by** day, and he did not listen to her, to lie beside her, to be with her.*

"She spoke to Joseph day by day, and he did not listen to her, to lie beside her, to be with her." Temptation is not always one big moment. Often it comes day after day, wearing a person down.

Joseph did not just say no. He would not even "be with her." He kept his distance. That is wise. The best way to resist some temptations is not to stand near them testing our strength, but to stay away from them. Proverbs warns a young man to keep his way far from the immoral woman and not go near the door of her house (Proverbs 5:8). Joseph did not wait until he was weak to make his decision. He made it ahead of time and kept it every day.

39:11-12 *And it came about on this day, and he went into the house to do his work, and not anyone of the men of the house **was** there in the house. And she seized him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." And he left his garment in her hand, and he fled and went outside.*

One day Joseph went into the house to work, and none of the other servants were there. She grabbed his garment: "Lie with me." And Joseph "left his garment in her hand, and he fled and went outside."

Joseph ran. Sometimes running is the bravest thing a person can do. Paul tells Timothy to "flee youthful desires" (2 Timothy 2:22), and to the Corinthians he says to flee immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18). Joseph lost his garment, but he kept his integrity.

For the second time, Joseph lost a garment. His brothers stripped him of his robe out of hatred. Potiphar's wife grabbed his garment out of lust. Both times, the garment was used to tell a lie about him. Both times, God was still in control.

39:13-18 *And it came about, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, and she called out to the men of her house, and she said to them, saying, "See, he has brought to us a Hebrew man to mock us. He came to me to lie with me, and I called out with a great voice. And it came about, when he heard that I raised my voice and called out, and he left his garment beside me, and he fled and went outside." And she placed his garment beside her until his master came to his house. And she spoke to him according to these words, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you brought to us, came to me to mock me. And it came about, when I raised my voice and called out, and he left his garment beside me and fled outside."*

Rejected and angry, Potiphar's wife turned on Joseph. She called the household servants and told them, "See, he has brought to us a Hebrew man to mock us." She blamed her husband for bringing Joseph in, and she played on prejudice against a foreigner, calling him "a Hebrew man."

When Potiphar came home, she told him the same story: "The Hebrew servant, whom you brought to us." She held up the garment as proof. It was a lie built around a piece of real evidence, the same kind of lie Joseph's brothers told Jacob (37:31-33).

Joseph did everything right and was still accused of doing wrong. That happens in a fallen world. Peter wrote that when we suffer for doing what is right and patiently endure it, this finds favor

with God (1 Peter 2:20). Jesus Himself was falsely accused. Doing right does not guarantee that people will treat us fairly, but God sees the truth.

This story shows that false accusations happen. It should never make us slow to listen to someone who tells us they have been abused. Most who speak up are telling the truth, and Scripture calls us to protect the weak (Psalm 82:3-4). We take every report seriously, and we let the truth come out.

39:19-20 *And it came about, when his master heard the words of his wife which she spoke to him, saying, "According to these things your servant did to me," and his anger burned. And the master of Joseph took him, and he put him into the prison house, the place where the prisoners of the king* ***were*** *confined; and he was there in the prison house.*

Potiphar "burned with anger," and he put Joseph "into the prison house, the place where the prisoners of the king were confined."

A slave accused of such a crime might well have been put to death. An old Egyptian story, the Tale of Two Brothers, even tells of a wife who falsely accuses a young man in much the same way. Potiphar put Joseph in prison instead. Some think this means Potiphar had doubts about his wife's story, though we aren't told. Either way, God spared Joseph's life and placed him exactly where he needed to be. The king's prison is where he would meet the king's officials in the next chapter.

Psalm 105 looks back on this time and says Joseph's feet were hurt with fetters and he was laid in irons, until what God had said came to pass and the word of the LORD tested him (Psalm 105:17-19). Prison was a real trial, and God used it to shape him.

39:21-23 *And the LORD was with Joseph, and He extended steadfast love to him, and He gave him favor in the eyes of the commander of the prison house. And the commander of the prison house gave into the hand of Joseph all the prisoners who* ***were*** *in the prison house; and all that they* ***were*** *doing there, he was* ***the one*** *doing* ***it****. The commander of the prison house* ***was*** *not seeing anything at all in his hand, because the LORD* ***was*** *with him; and what he* ***was*** *doing, the LORD* ***was*** *making successful.*

"The LORD was with him." The same words from verse 2 appear again. In Potiphar's house, God was with him. In prison, God was still with him. Joseph's address changed, but his God did not.

God "extended steadfast love to him." The word for steadfast love is God's faithful, covenant love. He gave Joseph "favor in the eyes of the commander of the prison house," who soon put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners. The jailer did not even check on Joseph's work, "because the LORD was with him; and what he was doing, the LORD was making successful."

Joseph could have given up. He was faithful in Potiphar's house and was punished for it. Yet he kept on being faithful in prison. Joseph did not know how his story would end, but he knew who was with him.

Many see in Joseph a picture of Christ here as well: the faithful servant who was tempted and did not sin, who was falsely accused and condemned, and who was later raised to a place of honor. Jesus was "tempted in all things according to likeness, without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Chapter 39 Summary

Joseph was taken to Egypt and bought by Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard. The LORD was with Joseph and made him successful, and Potiphar put him in charge of his whole household. The LORD blessed Potiphar's house because of Joseph. Potiphar's wife tried day after day to seduce Joseph, but he refused, saying he could not do this great evil and sin against God. One day she grabbed his garment, and he fled, leaving it in her hand. She falsely accused him of attacking her, and Potiphar put Joseph in prison. Even there, the LORD was with Joseph, showed him steadfast love, and gave him favor with the chief jailer, who put him in charge of all the prisoners.

Chapter 39 Study Questions

1. Who bought Joseph in Egypt, and what was his position? (39:1)

2. What phrase appears several times in this chapter, and what does it tell us? (39:2-3, 21, 23)

3. Potiphar's house was blessed because of Joseph. How does that connect with God's promise to Abraham in 12:3? (39:5)

4. What three reasons did Joseph give for refusing Potiphar's wife? (39:8-9)

5. How often did she tempt him, and how did Joseph guard himself? (39:10)

6. Joseph ran and left his garment behind. Why is running sometimes the wisest answer to temptation? (39:12; 2 Timothy 2:22)

7. What lie did Potiphar's wife tell, and what "evidence" did she use? (39:14-18)

8. Joseph's circumstances did not change, yet "the LORD was with Joseph" in prison. What does God's presence look like when hard circumstances stay the same? (39:21-23)

9. Joseph said that sinning would be a sin "against God." How does seeing sin that way help you resist temptation?

10. Joseph stayed faithful even when doing right led to suffering. Where do you need God's help to keep doing right when it isn't rewarded?

Chapter 40: The Cupbearer and the Baker

Scripture

40:1-8 And it came about after these things, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and the baker sinned against their master, against the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, with the chief of the cupbearers and with the chief of the bakers. And he put them in the custody of the house of the commander of the bodyguards, into the prison house, the place where Joseph ***was*** confined. And the commander of the bodyguards appointed Joseph with them, and he served them; and they were days in custody. And they dreamed a dream, both of them, each his dream in one night, each according to the interpretation of his dream, the cupbearer and the baker who ***belonged*** to the king of Egypt, who ***were*** confined in the prison house. And Joseph came to them in the morning, and he saw them, and look, they ***were*** dejected. And he asked the officials of Pharaoh who ***were*** with him in the custody of the house of his master, saying, "Why ***are*** your faces sad today?" And they said to him, "We dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it." And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations ***belong*** to God? Recount ***it*** to me, please."

40:9-23 And the chief of the cupbearers recounted his dream to Joseph, and he said to him, "In my dream, and look, a vine ***was*** before me, and on the vine ***were*** three branches; and it ***was*** as though budding, its blossom went up, its clusters ripened ***into*** grapes. And the cup of Pharaoh ***was*** in my hand, and I took the grapes and squeezed them into the cup of Pharaoh, and I put the cup on the palm of Pharaoh." And Joseph said to him, "This ***is*** its interpretation: the three branches, they ***are*** three days. In three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head, and he will restore you to your position, and you will put the cup of Pharaoh in his hand according to the former custom, when you were his cupbearer. Only remember me with you when it goes well for you, and please show steadfast love to me, and mention me to Pharaoh, and bring me out from this house. For I was surely stolen from the land of the Hebrews, and also here I have not done anything that they should have put me in the pit." And the chief of the bakers saw that he had interpreted well, and he said to Joseph, "I also, in my dream, and look, three baskets of white bread ***were*** on my head, and in the upper basket ***were some*** of all the food of Pharaoh, the work of a baker; and the birds ***were*** eating them from the basket, from on my head." And Joseph answered and said, "This ***is*** its interpretation: the three baskets, they ***are*** three days. In three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from on you, and he will hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat your flesh from on you." And it came about on the third day, the day of the birth of Pharaoh, and he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief of the cupbearers and the head of the chief of the bakers among his servants. And he restored the chief of the cupbearers to his cupbearing, and he put the cup on the palm of Pharaoh. And the chief of the bakers he hanged, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. And the chief of the cupbearers did not remember Joseph, and he forgot him.

Chapter 40 Preview

Joseph is still in prison, but he is in charge of the other prisoners. Two of Pharaoh's officials, his chief cupbearer and his chief baker, offend the king and are put in the same jail. One night each of

them has a dream, and in the morning they are troubled because no one can tell them what the dreams mean. Joseph says that interpretations belong to God, and he asks to hear them.

The cupbearer's dream means he will be restored to his job in three days. The baker's dream means he will be put to death in three days. Both come true on Pharaoh's birthday, just as Joseph said. Joseph asks the cupbearer to remember him to Pharaoh and get him out of prison. But the chapter ends with a painful line: the cupbearer forgot him. Joseph will wait two more years. God's timing is not always fast, but it is never late.

Chapter 40 Study

40:1-4 *And it came about after these things, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and the baker sinned against their master, against the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, with the chief of the cupbearers and with the chief of the bakers. And he put them in the custody of the house of the commander of the bodyguards, into the prison house, the place where Joseph **was** confined. And the commander of the bodyguards appointed Joseph with them, and he served them; and they were days in custody.*

"After these things," the cupbearer and the baker "sinned against their master, against the king of Egypt." A cupbearer served the king his wine, and he may have tasted it first to guard against poison. It was a position of great trust, and in Egypt such royal butlers were trusted officials, sometimes used by the king for important business. Nehemiah held the same job for the king of Persia (Nehemiah 1:11). The chief baker oversaw the bread and food for the king's table.

Their offense is not named. "Pharaoh was angry," and he put both of them in "the prison house, the place where Joseph was confined."

"The commander of the bodyguards appointed Joseph with them." This was most likely Potiphar himself (39:1). The man who put Joseph in prison now trusted him to look after the king's officials. God was setting the stage. These were not random prisoners. One of them would someday open the door for Joseph to stand before Pharaoh.

"They were days in custody," that is, for some time. Joseph was seventeen when he was sold (37:2) and thirty when he stood before Pharaoh (41:46). That means about thirteen years passed between the pit and the palace, many of them in this prison. Joseph learned to serve faithfully in a place he did not choose, for a length of time he did not know. Most of us will have seasons like that. They are not wasted when God is in them.

40:5-8 *And they dreamed a dream, both of them, each his dream in one night, each according to the interpretation of his dream, the cupbearer and the baker who **belonged** to the king of Egypt, who **were** confined in the prison house. And Joseph came to them in the morning, and he saw them, and look, they **were** dejected. And he asked the officials of Pharaoh who **were** with him in the custody of the house of his master, saying, "Why **are** your faces sad today?" And they said to him, "We dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it." And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations **belong** to God? Recount **it** to me, please."*

Both men "dreamed a dream, both of them, each his dream in one night, each according to the interpretation of his dream." In the morning Joseph saw that they were "dejected," meaning sad and discouraged. He asked, "Why are your faces sad today?"

That small question tells us a lot about Joseph. He had every reason to be wrapped up in his own troubles. Instead he noticed the faces of the men around him and cared enough to ask. A heart that has been hurt can either grow hard or grow kind. Joseph's grew kind.

The Egyptians took dreams very seriously and had trained men to interpret them. In prison, these officials had no one to ask. Joseph answered with humility and faith: "Do not interpretations belong to God?" He did not claim any special power of his own. He pointed to God. Daniel would say the same thing to Nebuchadnezzar centuries later: there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries (Daniel 2:27-28).

40:9-11 *And the chief of the cupbearers recounted his dream to Joseph, and he said to him, "In my dream, and look, a vine **was** before me, and on the vine **were** three branches; and it **was** as though budding, its blossom went up, its clusters ripened **into** grapes. And the cup of Pharaoh **was** in my hand, and I took the grapes and squeezed them into the cup of Pharaoh, and I put the cup on the palm of Pharaoh."*

The cupbearer went first. He saw a vine with "three branches." It budded, blossomed and produced ripe grapes all at once. He took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and put the cup in Pharaoh's hand.

It was a dream about his own job. He was doing exactly what a cupbearer does. The quick growth of the vine suggests that something was going to happen soon.

God speaks in many ways in Scripture, and in Genesis He often speaks through dreams. Not every dream is from God, and the Bible warns against trusting dreams that lead people away from Him (Deuteronomy 13:1-3; Jeremiah 23:28). Today God has spoken fully and finally through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2), and we test everything by His written Word. But in Joseph's day, before any of the Bible was written, God chose to reveal His plans this way, and He gave Joseph the gift of understanding them.

40:12-13 *And Joseph said to him, "This **is** its interpretation: the three branches, they **are** three days. In three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head, and he will restore you to your position, and you will put the cup of Pharaoh in his hand according to the former custom, when you were his cupbearer.*

"This is its interpretation: the three branches, they are three days." Within three days, "Pharaoh will lift up your head, and he will restore you to your position."

To "lift up your head" was a way of saying someone would be honored or brought out to stand before the king. Joseph told the cupbearer that he would be back at his post, putting Pharaoh's cup in his hand "according to the former custom, when you were his cupbearer."

Joseph spoke with confidence. He did not say, "Maybe." He trusted that God had given him the meaning. Faith rests on what God has revealed.

40:14-15 *Only remember me with you when it goes well for you, and please show steadfast love to me, and mention me to Pharaoh, and bring me out from this house. For I was surely stolen from the land of the Hebrews, and also here I have not done anything that they should have put me in the pit."*

Then Joseph made a personal request. "Only remember me with you when it goes well for you, and please show steadfast love to me." He asked the cupbearer to mention him to Pharaoh and "bring me out from this house."

He told his story in one sentence: "I was surely stolen from the land of the Hebrews, and also here I have not done anything that they should have put me in the pit." Joseph did not name his brothers or blame Potiphar's wife. He simply said he was innocent.

Was it wrong for Joseph to ask for help? No. Trusting God does not mean we never ask people for help. Paul appealed to Caesar when he was treated unjustly (Acts 25:11). Joseph used an honest means to seek his freedom and left the outcome with God. It is right to pray and also to act wisely.

40:16-17 *And the chief of the bakers saw that he had interpreted well, and he said to Joseph, "I also, in my dream, and look, three baskets of white bread **were** on my head, and in the upper basket **were some** of all the food of Pharaoh, the work of a baker; and the birds **were** eating them from the basket, from on my head."*

The chief baker heard the good news for the cupbearer and decided to share his dream too. He saw "three baskets of white bread were on my head." The top basket held all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but "the birds were eating them from the basket, from on my head."

There is a difference between the two dreams. In the cupbearer's dream, he served Pharaoh and the work was completed. In the baker's dream, the food never reached the king. Birds took it. Something was wrong.

40:18-19 *And Joseph answered and said, "This **is** its interpretation: the three baskets, they **are** three days. In three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from on you, and he will hang you on a tree, and the birds will eat your flesh from on you."*

Joseph gave the meaning plainly. "The three baskets, they are three days." Within three days Pharaoh would "lift up your head from on you." The same phrase used for the cupbearer is used here with a terrible twist. The cupbearer's head would be lifted up in honor. The baker's head would be lifted off. He would be put to death, and his body hung "on a tree," where birds would eat his flesh.

That was a hard thing to say. Joseph could have softened it or stayed quiet. He did not. He told the truth even when it was bad news. Those who speak for God must be faithful to say what He has said, both the good and the hard (Acts 20:27). Telling the truth in love is not cruelty. Hiding it would have been.

40:20-22 *And it came about on the third day, the day of the birth of Pharaoh, and he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief of the cupbearers and the head of the chief of the bakers among his servants. And he restored the chief of the cupbearers to his cupbearing, and he put the cup on the palm of Pharaoh. And the chief of the bakers he hanged, just as Joseph had interpreted to them.*

"On the third day, the day of the birth of Pharaoh," Pharaoh threw a feast for his servants. It is the first birthday mentioned in the Bible. He "lifted up the head" of both men. He restored the cupbearer to his job, but "the chief of the bakers he hanged, just as Joseph had interpreted to them."

Everything happened exactly as God had shown Joseph. These words, "just as Joseph had interpreted," prove that Joseph was not a lucky guesser. God had spoken through him. A true word from God always comes to pass (Deuteronomy 18:22).

Joseph's own dreams from years before had not yet come true. But here God showed him, in a small way, that He reveals the future and keeps His word. That would have been an encouragement to a young man still waiting on his own dreams.

40:23 *And the chief of the cupbearers did not remember Joseph, and he forgot him.*

"The chief of the cupbearers did not remember Joseph, and he forgot him." That is the last line of the chapter, and it hurts. Joseph had helped him, asked one small favor, and was forgotten. The next chapter tells us Joseph waited "two full years" (41:1).

People forget. Even people we have helped. But God never forgets His own. Isaiah says a mother may forget her nursing child, but God will not forget His people (Isaiah 49:15). The cupbearer's memory failed, but God had not forgotten Joseph. If the cupbearer had spoken up right away, Joseph might have been released and sent home, and he would not have been there when Pharaoh needed someone to explain his dreams.

If you are waiting today, and it seems people have forgotten you, take heart from Joseph. God sees you in the prison, and He has not forgotten you.

Chapter 40 Summary

Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and chief baker offended him and were put in the same prison as Joseph, who was put in charge of them. One night both men had dreams, and in the morning they were sad because no one could interpret them. Joseph said that interpretations belong to God and asked to hear the dreams. The cupbearer dreamed of a vine with three branches and of serving Pharaoh his cup; Joseph said that in three days he would be restored. Joseph asked him to remember him to Pharaoh. The baker dreamed of three baskets on his head with birds eating the food; Joseph said that in three days Pharaoh would put him to death. On Pharaoh's birthday, three days later, both dreams came true. But the cupbearer forgot Joseph.

Chapter 40 Study Questions

1. Who were the two officials put in prison, and what did each one do for Pharaoh? (40:1-3)

2. The captain of the bodyguard, the man who had put Joseph in prison, now trusted him with the king's officials. What does that suggest about how Joseph had lived? (40:4; 39:21-23)

3. How did Joseph notice that something was wrong with the two men? (40:6-7)

4. What did Joseph say about where interpretations come from? (40:8)

5. What did the cupbearer's dream mean? (40:9-13)

6. Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him. Is it a lack of faith to ask people for help? Why or why not? (40:14-15)

7. Joseph gave the baker bad news plainly. Why does it matter to speak hard truth honestly and with care? (40:16-19)

8. What happened on Pharaoh's birthday, and what did the cupbearer do afterward? (40:20-23)

9. Joseph cared about the sad faces of the men around him, even while he was suffering. Who around you might need you to notice them this week?

10. Joseph was forgotten for two more years. How do you keep trusting God when people forget you and His timing feels slow?

Chapter 41: Joseph Rules in Egypt

Scripture

41:1-24 And it came about at the end of two full years, and Pharaoh ***was*** dreaming, and look, he ***was*** standing by the Nile. And look, from the Nile seven cows ***were*** coming up, beautiful of appearance and fat of flesh, and they grazed among the reeds. And look, seven other cows ***were*** coming up after them from the Nile, ugly of appearance and thin of flesh, and they stood beside the cows on the bank of the Nile. And the cows ugly of appearance and thin of flesh ate the seven cows beautiful of appearance and fat. And Pharaoh awoke. And he slept and dreamed a second ***time***, and look, seven ears of grain ***were*** coming up on one stalk, fat and good. And look, seven ears of grain, thin and scorched ***by*** an east wind, ***were*** springing up after them. And the thin ears of grain swallowed the seven fat and full ears of grain. And Pharaoh awoke, and look, ***it was*** a dream. And it came about in the morning, and his spirit was troubled; and he sent and summoned all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men; and Pharaoh recounted to them his dream, and there was no interpreter of them for Pharaoh. And the chief of the cupbearers spoke with Pharaoh, saying, "My sins I ***am*** calling to mind today. Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and he put me in the custody of the house of the commander of the bodyguards, me and the chief of the bakers. And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; each according to the interpretation of his dream we dreamed. And there with us ***was*** a Hebrew young man, a servant to the commander of the bodyguards; and we recounted ***them*** to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each according to his dream he interpreted. And it came about, just as he interpreted for us, so it was: me he restored to my position, and him he hanged." And Pharaoh sent and summoned Joseph, and they brought him quickly from the pit; and he shaved and changed his clothes, and he came to Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it; and I, I have heard about you, saying, 'You hear a dream to interpret it.'" And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "***It is*** not in me; God will answer ***for*** the welfare of Pharaoh." And Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, "In my dream, look, I ***was*** standing on the bank of the Nile. And look, from the Nile seven cows ***were*** coming up, fat of flesh and beautiful of form, and they grazed among the reeds. And look, seven other cows ***were*** coming up after them, poor and very ugly of form and thin of flesh; I have not seen ***any*** like them in all the land of Egypt for ugliness. And the thin and ugly cows ate the first seven fat cows. And they went into their insides, and it was not known that they had gone into their insides, and their appearance ***was*** ugly just as at the beginning. And I awoke. And I saw in my dream, and look, seven ears of grain ***were*** coming up on one stalk, full and good. And look, seven ears of grain, withered, thin, scorched ***by*** an east wind, ***were*** springing up after them. And the thin ears of grain swallowed the seven good ears of grain. And I told ***it*** to the magicians, and there was no one declaring ***it*** to me."

41:25-45 And Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dream of Pharaoh, it ***is*** one; what God ***is*** about to do He has declared to Pharaoh. The seven good cows, they ***are*** seven years; and the seven good ears of grain, they ***are*** seven years; the dream, it ***is*** one. And the seven thin and ugly cows that came up after them, they ***are*** seven years; and the seven empty ears of grain, scorched ***by*** the east wind, will be seven years of famine. That ***is*** the word which I spoke to Pharaoh: what God ***is*** about to do He has shown Pharaoh. Look, seven years ***are*** coming, great plenty in all the land of Egypt. And

seven years of famine will arise after them, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine will consume the land. And the plenty will not be known in the land because of that famine afterward, for it ***will be*** very heavy. And concerning the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, ***it is*** because the matter ***is*** established by God, and God ***is*** hastening to do it. And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man, and let him set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh act, and let him appoint overseers over the land, and let him take a fifth of the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty. And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and let them store up grain under the hand of Pharaoh, food in the cities, and let them keep ***it***. And the food shall be for a store for the land for the seven years of famine which will be in the land of Egypt, and the land shall not be cut off by the famine." And the word was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find ***one*** like this, a man in whom ***is*** the spirit of God?" And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "After God has made you know all this, there is no ***one*** discerning and wise like you. You, you shall be over my house, and on your mouth all my people shall kiss; only ***in*** the throne will I be greater than you." And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." And Pharaoh removed his signet ring from on his hand and set it on the hand of Joseph, and he clothed him ***in*** garments of fine linen, and he put the chain of gold on his neck. And he made him ride in the second chariot which ***belonged*** to him, and they called out before him, "Bow the knee!" And he set him over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I ***am*** Pharaoh, and apart from you no man shall lift up his hand and his foot in all the land of Egypt." And Pharaoh called the name of Joseph Zaphenath-paneah, and he gave to him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, as a wife. And Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.

41:46-57 And Joseph ***was*** a son of thirty years when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from before Pharaoh, and he passed through all the land of Egypt. And the land produced in the seven years of plenty by handfuls. And he gathered all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and he put food in the cities; the food of the field of the city which ***was*** around it he put in its midst. And Joseph stored up grain like the sand of the sea, very much, until he ceased to count, for there was no number. And to Joseph two sons were born before the year of the famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bore to him. And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: "For God has made me forget all my trouble and all the house of my father." And the name of the second he called Ephraim: "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." And the seven years of the plenty that was in the land of Egypt came to an end. And the seven years of the famine began to come, just as Joseph had said; and ***there*** was famine in all the lands, and in all the land of Egypt ***there*** was bread. And all the land of Egypt was hungry, and the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all Egypt, "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, you shall do." And the famine was over all the face of the land; and Joseph opened all that ***was*** in them, and he sold grain to Egypt; and the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. And all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain, to Joseph, for the famine was severe in all the earth.

Chapter 41 Preview

At the end of chapter 40, the cupbearer walks out of prison and forgets all about Joseph. Two more years go by. Then one night Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, has two dreams that none of his wise men

can explain. Suddenly the cupbearer remembers the Hebrew slave who read his own dream correctly. Within hours Joseph is shaved, dressed and standing before the most powerful man in the world.

Joseph gives God the credit, explains the dreams and lays out a plan to save Egypt from a coming famine. Pharaoh sets him over the whole land. In one day Joseph goes from the dungeon to the second chariot of Egypt. Thirteen years of suffering have not been wasted. God has been preparing Joseph all along, and now the famine will bring Joseph's family to his door.

Chapter 41 Study

41:1-4 *And it came about at the end of two full years, and Pharaoh **was** dreaming, and look, he **was** standing by the Nile. And look, from the Nile seven cows **were** coming up, beautiful of appearance and fat of flesh, and they grazed among the reeds. And look, seven other cows **were** coming up after them from the Nile, ugly of appearance and thin of flesh, and they stood beside the cows on the bank of the Nile. And the cows ugly of appearance and thin of flesh ate the seven cows beautiful of appearance and fat. And Pharaoh awoke.*

"Two full years" had passed since the cupbearer was set free. Joseph had asked him to remember him (40:14), and he did not. Two years is a long time to wait in a prison cell, and Joseph could not see what God was doing with them.

Pharaoh, as we saw in chapter 12, is the king's title, not his name. We aren't told which Pharaoh this was.

In the first dream Pharaoh stood "by the Nile." The Nile was the life of Egypt. Almost no rain falls there, and every crop depended on the river rising each year. Cows grazing in the reeds by the river were a picture of a good year. Then seven "ugly of appearance and thin of flesh" cows came up and ate the fat ones.

41:5-7 *And he slept and dreamed a second **time**, and look, seven ears of grain **were** coming up on one stalk, fat and good. And look, seven ears of grain, thin and scorched **by** an east wind, **were** springing up after them. And the thin ears of grain swallowed the seven fat and full ears of grain. And Pharaoh awoke, and look, **it was** a dream.*

Pharaoh went back to sleep and had a second dream with the same message. This time it was grain: seven good ears on one stalk, then seven thin ones "scorched by the east wind." The east wind in that part of the world blows hot off the desert and can wither crops in a day.

The thin ears "swallowed" the full ones. Then Pharaoh woke up, "and look, it was a dream." You can almost feel his relief and his unease at the same time. The dream had felt real. He knew it meant something, but he didn't know what.

41:8 *And it came about in the morning, and his spirit was troubled; and he sent and summoned all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men; and Pharaoh recounted to them his dream, and there was no interpreter of them for Pharaoh.*

Pharaoh's "spirit was troubled." The most powerful man on earth could not sleep well because of something he could not control or understand.

The "magicians" were a class of priests and scholars who studied omens, dreams and sacred writings. Egypt was famous for them. Moses would later face men like this (Exodus 7:11). They had books and methods for explaining dreams, yet "there was no interpreter of them." God had closed their understanding so that the answer would have to come from Him through His servant. The wisdom of this world, at its very best, cannot read the mind of God (1 Corinthians 1:20-25).

41:9-13 *And the chief of the cupbearers spoke with Pharaoh, saying, "My sins I **am** calling to mind today. Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and he put me in the custody of the house of the commander of the bodyguards, me and the chief of the bakers. And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; each according to the interpretation of his dream we dreamed. And there with us **was** a Hebrew young man, a servant to the commander of the bodyguards; and we recounted **them** to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each according to his dream he interpreted. And it came about, just as he interpreted for us, so it was: me he restored to my position, and him he hanged."*

Finally the cupbearer speaks. "My sins I am calling to mind today." He may have meant the offense that put him in prison, or his failure to remember Joseph, or both. Either way, he chose his words carefully. You did not want to remind a king of the time he was angry with you.

His account is honest and simple. He calls Joseph "a Hebrew young man" and "a servant," which is how the Egyptians saw him: young, foreign and a slave. But he also tells the important part: "just as he interpreted." Joseph's word had come true down to the detail. One man was restored and the other was hanged, as Joseph had said.

God used a forgetful man's memory at the exact moment it was needed. People may forget you. God never does.

41:14 *And Pharaoh sent and summoned Joseph, and they brought him quickly from the pit; and he shaved and changed his clothes, and he came to Pharaoh.*

Things move fast now. "They brought him quickly from the pit." After years of waiting, everything changed in a morning.

Joseph "shaved and changed his clothes." Hebrew men usually wore beards, but Egyptians were clean-shaven, and a man did not come before Pharaoh looking like a prisoner. Clothing has been part of Joseph's story from the start. His brothers stripped off his special robe (37:23). Potiphar's wife grabbed his garment (39:12). Now he puts on new clothes to stand before the king, and soon Pharaoh will dress him in fine linen (41:42).

When God's time comes, it can come quickly. If you are in a long season of waiting, don't give up. God has not forgotten you, even when His answer looks different from what you hoped.

41:15-16 *And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it; and I, I have heard about you, saying, 'You hear a dream to interpret it.'" And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "**It is** not in me; God will answer **for** the welfare of Pharaoh."*

Pharaoh opens with flattery: "I have heard about you, saying, 'You hear a dream to interpret it.'" This was Joseph's big moment. He could have taken the praise. Instead he said, "It is not in me; God will answer for the welfare of Pharaoh."

That is the heart of a godly man. Joseph had said the same thing to the cupbearer and baker: interpretations belong to God (40:8). Two years in prison had not made him bitter or proud. He pointed away from himself to the true God, in the court of a king who was thought to be a god himself.

We are often tempted to take a little credit when God uses us. Joseph shows us a better way. Whatever gift you have comes from God, and He gets the glory.

41:17-24 *And Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, "In my dream, look, I **was** standing on the bank of the Nile. And look, from the Nile seven cows **were** coming up, fat of flesh and beautiful of form, and they grazed among the reeds. And look, seven other cows **were** coming up after them, poor and very ugly of form and thin of flesh; I have not seen **any** like them in all the land of Egypt for ugliness. And the thin and ugly cows ate the first seven fat cows. And they went into their insides, and it was not known that they had gone into their insides, and their appearance **was** ugly just as at the beginning. And I awoke. And I saw in my dream, and look, seven ears of grain **were** coming up on one stalk, full and good. And look, seven ears of grain, withered, thin, scorched **by** an east wind, **were** springing up after them. And the thin ears of grain swallowed the seven good ears of grain. And I told **it** to the magicians, and there was no one declaring **it** to me."*

Pharaoh retells both dreams. There are a few new details. The lean cows were so ugly that he had "not seen" such cows "in all the land of Egypt." And even after they ate the fat cows, "it was not known" that they had eaten anything. They were just as starved as before.

That detail will matter. The famine would be so severe that even the good years would seem to vanish without a trace. Pharaoh ends by admitting again that his magicians had failed him. He had nowhere else to turn.

41:25-28 *And Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dream of Pharaoh, it **is** one; what God **is** about to do He has declared to Pharaoh. The seven good cows, they **are** seven years; and the seven good ears of grain, they **are** seven years; the dream, it **is** one. And the seven thin and ugly cows that came up after them, they **are** seven years; and the seven empty ears of grain, scorched **by** the east wind, will be seven years of famine. That **is** the word which I spoke to Pharaoh: what God **is** about to do He has shown Pharaoh.*

Joseph's answer comes right away and with confidence. "The dream of Pharaoh, it is one." Both say the same thing in two pictures.

Three times in this passage Joseph says that God is the one behind it all: "what God is about to do He has declared to Pharaoh" (41:25), "what God is about to do He has shown Pharaoh" (41:28), and in verse 32, "the matter is established by God." Joseph wants Pharaoh to understand that these dreams are not luck, fate or the work of Egypt's gods. The God of Abraham rules over the Nile and the harvest, and He was telling Pharaoh the future so that lives could be saved.

41:29-32 *Look, seven years **are** coming, great plenty in all the land of Egypt. And seven years of famine will arise after them, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine will consume the land. And the plenty will not be known in the land because of that famine afterward, for it **will be** very heavy. And concerning the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, **it is** because the matter **is** established by God, and God **is** hastening to do it.*

Seven years of "great plenty" will come, and then seven years of famine so severe that "all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt." A famine is a long shortage of food, usually caused by failed harvests.

Why two dreams? Joseph explains that the repetition means "the matter is established by God, and God is hastening to do it." In Scripture, when God says something twice, it is settled. Joseph's own dreams had come in pairs as well (37:5-9).

41:33-36 *And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man, and let him set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh act, and let him appoint overseers over the land, and let him take a fifth of the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty. And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and let them store up grain under the hand of Pharaoh, food in the cities, and let them keep **it**. And the food shall be for a store for the land for the seven years of famine which will be in the land of Egypt, and the land shall not be cut off by the famine."*

Joseph wasn't asked for advice, but he gave it anyway, and it was wise. Knowing the future is not enough. You have to act on it.

His plan was simple. Find "a discerning and wise man" to oversee it. Appoint officials over the land. Take "a fifth of the land of Egypt," that is, twenty percent of its harvest, during the good years. Store the grain in the cities and guard it. Then, when the famine comes, there will be "a store for the land," and "the land shall not be cut off by the famine."

Joseph gives us a good lesson in faith and planning. Joseph trusted God completely, and he also planned carefully. Those two things do not fight each other. The ant stores up food in summer for the winter (Proverbs 6:6-8). Believing that God is in control doesn't mean we stop being wise with what He gives us.

41:37-40 *And the word was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find **one** like this, a man in whom **is** the spirit of God?" And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "After God has made you know all this, there is no **one** discerning and wise like you. You, you shall be over my house, and on your mouth all my people shall kiss; only **in** the throne will I be greater than you."*

Pharaoh and his officials agreed. Then Pharaoh asked, "Can we find one like this, a man in whom is the spirit of God?" Pharaoh was a pagan, and he did not mean all that we mean by the Holy Spirit. But he could see that the God Joseph served was with him. People around you can tell when God is at work in your life, even if they don't understand it.

Pharaoh did not go looking for someone else. "There is no one discerning and wise like you." Joseph would be over Pharaoh's house, and all the people would obey his word. "Only in the throne will I be greater than you." Joseph became the second most powerful man in Egypt. Some call his office prime minister or vizier.

Remember Joseph's dreams back in chapter 37, the sheaves and the stars bowing down. For thirteen years it looked as if those dreams had died. Now God is bringing them to pass, not in the way Joseph expected, but in His way.

41:41-44 *And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." And Pharaoh removed his signet ring from on his hand and set it on the hand of Joseph, and he clothed him **in** garments of fine linen, and he put the chain of gold on his neck. And he made him ride in the second chariot which **belonged** to him, and they called out before him, "Bow the knee!" And he set him over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I **am** Pharaoh, and apart from you no man shall lift up his hand and his foot in all the land of Egypt."*

Pharaoh makes it official with three gifts. The "signet ring" was a ring with the king's seal on it. Pressed into clay or wax, it signed documents with Pharaoh's own authority. The "garments of fine linen" were the clothing of royalty and high officials. The "chain of gold" was a mark of honor.

Then Joseph rode in Pharaoh's "second chariot," and men ran ahead shouting, "Bow the knee!" Pharaoh adds that no one in Egypt would "lift up his hand and his foot" without Joseph's permission. Nothing would happen in Egypt without him.

Many see a picture of Christ here. Like Joseph, Jesus was rejected by His brothers, suffered unjustly and was then raised to the place of highest authority, and every knee will one day bow to Him (Philippians 2:9-11). The New Testament never calls Joseph a type of Christ in so many words, so I hold this loosely, but the likeness is hard to miss.

New Testament links: Acts 7:10 (alluded to)

41:45 *And Pharaoh called the name of Joseph Zaphenath-paneah, and he gave to him Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, as a wife. And Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.*

Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name, "Zaphenath-paneah." Scholars are not sure what it means. Suggestions include 'God speaks and he lives' and 'the one who supplies the food of life.' Either way, Joseph was being made an Egyptian official in every outward way.

He also received a wife, "Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On." On was a city in what is now northeastern Cairo, later called Heliopolis, which means city of the sun. It was a center for the worship of the sun god Ra. This was a marriage into a high-ranking priestly family.

Genesis is silent on whether Asenath came to worship Joseph's God. What we do see is that Joseph's own faith stayed strong. He received an Egyptian name, an Egyptian wife and an Egyptian job, and he still named his sons with words of praise to the God of his fathers (41:51-52). You can live in a foreign culture without letting it rule your heart. Daniel would do the same in Babylon (Daniel 1:7-8).

41:46 *And Joseph **was** a son of thirty years when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from before Pharaoh, and he passed through all the land of Egypt.*

Joseph "was a son of thirty years" when he stood before Pharaoh. He was seventeen when his brothers sold him (37:2). Thirteen years of slavery, false accusation and prison lay behind him.

God is never in a hurry, and He never wastes our pain. Those years taught Joseph to run a household, to manage a prison and to trust God when nothing made sense. David was also thirty when he began to reign (2 Samuel 5:4), and Jesus was about thirty when He began His ministry (Luke 3:23). God often prepares His servants in hidden places for a long time before He brings them out.

41:47-49 *And the land produced in the seven years of plenty by handfuls. And he gathered all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and he put food in the cities; the food of the field of the city which **was** around it he put in its midst. And Joseph stored up grain like the sand of the sea, very much, until he ceased to count, for there was no number.*

Just as Joseph had said, the land produced "by handfuls," that is, in great abundance. Joseph went right to work. He gathered the grain and stored it in the cities, with each city keeping the food from its own fields. That was sensible. It meant the food would be close to the people who needed it later.

The harvest was so large that Joseph stored grain "like the sand of the sea," and finally "he ceased to count." That phrase "like the sand of the sea" is the same picture God used in His promise to Abraham's family (22:17; 32:12). God is a God of abundance, and He gave more than enough.

41:50-52 *And to Joseph two sons were born before the year of the famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bore to him. And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: "For God has made me forget all my trouble and all the house of my father." And the name of the second he called Ephraim: "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."*

Before the famine came, Joseph had two sons. Their names tell us what was going on in his heart.

He named the firstborn "Manasseh," which sounds like the Hebrew word for "forget." "God has made me forget all my trouble and all the house of my father." This doesn't mean Joseph stopped caring about his father. It means God had healed the sharp pain of the past. The memories no longer ruled him.

He named the second "Ephraim," which sounds like the Hebrew word for "fruitful." "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction." Joseph did not wait to leave Egypt before he could be fruitful. God made him fruitful right where he had suffered.

Both names give God the credit. That is a good word for anyone carrying old hurts. God can help you let go of what was done to you, and He can make you fruitful in the very place that once broke your heart.

41:53-54 *And the seven years of the plenty that was in the land of Egypt came to an end. And the seven years of the famine began to come, just as Joseph had said; and **there** was famine in all the lands, and in all the land of Egypt **there** was bread.*

The seven good years ended, and the famine began, "just as Joseph had said." God's word through Joseph proved true again.

"There was famine in all the lands, and in all the land of Egypt there was bread." One man's obedience and planning meant life for a whole nation. God had sent the warning, God had raised up the man and God had provided the time to prepare.

New Testament links: Acts 7:11 (alluded to)

41:55-57 *And all the land of Egypt was hungry, and the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all Egypt, "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, you shall do." And the famine was over all the face of the land; and Joseph opened all that **was** in them, and he sold grain to Egypt; and the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. And all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain, to Joseph, for the famine was severe in all the earth.*

When the people of Egypt ran out of food, they cried to Pharaoh. His answer was short: "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, you shall do."

Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain. Soon "all the earth" came to Egypt to buy from him, because the famine was severe everywhere. "All the earth" here means the whole region around Egypt, the world as the people of that day knew it.

All of this sets up the rest of Genesis. Somewhere up in Canaan, an old man named Jacob and his sons are running out of food too. God is about to bring the brothers who sold Joseph to the very

man they tried to get rid of. Many see in Pharaoh's words a picture of the gospel. There is only one place to find the bread of life, and that is Jesus (John 6:35). There is no other name by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Chapter 41 Summary

Two years after the cupbearer forgot him, Joseph was still in prison. Then Pharaoh dreamed of seven fat cows eaten by seven gaunt cows, and seven full ears swallowed by seven thin ones. None of Egypt's magicians could explain the dreams. The cupbearer finally remembered Joseph, who was brought out of the dungeon. Joseph told Pharaoh that the answer was not in him but in God, and he explained that seven years of plenty would be followed by seven years of severe famine. He advised Pharaoh to appoint a wise man to store a fifth of the harvest during the good years. Pharaoh set Joseph over all Egypt, gave him his signet ring, fine linen, a gold necklace, an Egyptian name and a wife. At thirty, Joseph stored up grain beyond measure and had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, whose names praised God for healing and fruitfulness. When the famine came, Egypt had bread, and people from every land came to Joseph to buy grain.

People and Places

- Nile: the great river of Egypt, the source of nearly all its water and crops.
- On: an Egyptian city near modern Cairo, later called Heliopolis, a center of sun worship.
- Asenath: Joseph's Egyptian wife, daughter of Potiphera, priest of On.
- Manasseh and Ephraim: Joseph's two sons, born in Egypt before the famine.

My season of heavy drinking was a long wait of my own making. I was relying on myself, not on God, and He let me go my own way for a while. I knew He was there the whole time, waiting. Looking back, I can see He never stopped watching over me. Joseph's long wait reminds me that God is still at work when we cannot see it.

Chapter 41 Study Questions

1. Joseph waited two more full years after the cupbearer forgot him (41:1). Why do you think God allowed this delay, and what might Joseph have learned in it?

2. What were Pharaoh's two dreams, and why couldn't his magicians help? (41:1-8)

3. What did Joseph say when Pharaoh praised his ability to interpret dreams? (41:16)

4. Joseph said the dream came twice because the matter was settled by God (41:32). How does that help you trust what God has said in His Word?

5. Joseph trusted God completely and also planned carefully (41:33-36). How do faith and wise planning work together in your own life?

6. What did Pharaoh give Joseph when he set him over Egypt? (41:42-45)

7. How old was Joseph when he stood before Pharaoh, and how long had he been in Egypt? (41:46; 37:2)

8. What do the names Manasseh and Ephraim mean, and what do they show about Joseph's heart? (41:51-52)

9. Joseph waited thirteen years before God lifted him up. What is a season of waiting in your life, and how can Joseph's story encourage you?

10. Joseph said, "It is not in me." How can you give God the credit when He uses your gifts?

Chapter 42: Joseph's Brothers Come to Egypt

Scripture

42:1-17 And Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, "Why are you looking at one another?" And he said, "Look, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy grain for us from there, and we will live and not die." And the ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt. And Benjamin, the brother of Joseph, Jacob did not send with his brothers, for he said, "Lest harm happen to him." And the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan. And Joseph, he ***was*** the ruler over the land; he ***was*** the one selling grain to all the people of the land. And the brothers of Joseph came and bowed down to him, face to the ground. And Joseph saw his brothers, and he recognized them; and he acted as a stranger to them, and he spoke harsh ***things*** with them, and he said to them, "From where have you come?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." And Joseph recognized his brothers, and they did not recognize him. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them, and he said to them, "You ***are*** spies! To see the nakedness of the land you have come." And they said to him, "No, my lord, and your servants have come to buy food. All of us ***are*** sons of one man; we ***are*** honest; your servants have not been spies." And he said to them, "No, but the nakedness of the land you have come to see." And they said, "Your servants ***are*** twelve brothers; we ***are*** the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and look, the youngest ***is*** with our father today, and the one is not." And Joseph said to them, "It ***is*** what I spoke to you, saying, 'You ***are*** spies.' By this you will be tested: ***by*** the life of Pharaoh, you will not go out from here unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him take your brother, and you, be bound, and let your words be tested, whether truth ***is*** with you; and if not, ***by*** the life of Pharaoh, surely you ***are*** spies." And he gathered them into custody ***for*** three days.

42:18-28 And Joseph said to them on the third day, "Do this and live; I fear God. If you ***are*** honest, let one brother of yours be bound in the house of your custody; and you, go, bring grain ***for*** the hunger of your households. And your youngest brother you will bring to me, and let your words be verified, and you will not die." And they did so. And they said, each to his brother, "Truly we ***are*** guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us for favor, and we did not listen. Therefore this distress has come to us." And Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not say to you, saying, 'Do not sin against the boy'? And you did not listen; and also his blood, look, is being required." And they did not know that Joseph understood, for the interpreter ***was*** between them. And he turned away from them, and he wept, and he returned to them, and he spoke to them, and he took Simeon from them, and he bound him before their eyes. And Joseph commanded, and they filled their vessels ***with*** grain, and ***commanded*** to return their silver, each ***man's*** to his sack, and to give them provisions for the way. And he did so for them. And they lifted their grain onto their donkeys, and they went from there. And the one opened his sack to give fodder to his donkey at the lodging place, and he saw his silver, and look, it ***was*** in the mouth of his bag. And he said to his brothers, "My silver has been returned, and also, look, ***it is*** in my bag." And their heart failed, and they trembled, each to his brother, saying, "What ***is*** this ***that*** God has done to us?"

42:29-38 And they came to Jacob their father, to the land of Canaan, and they told him all the ***things*** that had happened to them, saying, "The man, the lord of the land, spoke harsh ***things*** with us, and he took us for ***men*** spying out the land. And we said to him, 'We ***are*** honest; we have not been spies. We ***are*** twelve brothers, sons of our father; the one is not, and the youngest ***is*** today with our father in the land of Canaan.' And the man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I will know that you ***are*** honest: leave one brother of yours with me, and take ***grain for*** the hunger of your households, and go. And bring your youngest brother to me, and I will know that you ***are*** not spies, that you ***are*** honest. Your brother I will give to you, and you will go about in the land.'" And it happened ***as*** they ***were*** emptying their sacks, and look, each man's bundle of silver ***was*** in his sack; and they saw their bundles of silver, they and their father, and they were afraid. And Jacob their father said to them, "Me you have bereaved: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and Benjamin you will take. Upon me all of them have been." And Reuben said to his father, saying, "My two sons you may put to death if I do not bring him to you. Give him into my hand, and I will bring him back to you." And he said, "My son will not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he alone is left; and harm may happen to him on the way on which you go, and you will bring down my gray hair in sorrow to Sheol."

Chapter 42 Preview

The famine reaches Canaan, and Jacob sends ten of his sons down to Egypt to buy grain. He keeps Benjamin, Rachel's other son, at home. In Egypt the brothers bow with their faces to the ground before the governor of the land. They have no idea that this powerful Egyptian is Joseph, the brother they sold more than twenty years before. Joseph knows them at once.

Joseph does not reveal himself. He speaks harshly, calls them spies, puts them in prison for three days and keeps Simeon as a hostage until they bring Benjamin. For the first time we hear the brothers admit their guilt over what they did to Joseph. On the way home they find their money in their sacks, and their hearts sink. Back in Canaan, old Jacob refuses to let Benjamin go.

Chapter 42 Study

42:1-2 *And Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, "Why are you looking at one another?" And he said, "Look, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy grain for us from there, and we will live and not die."*

Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt and asked his sons, "Why are you looking at one another?" It is a sharp question. The family was running out of food, and the brothers were just standing around looking at each other.

Some think they hesitated because Egypt was the last place they wanted to go. That is where they had sent Joseph. The text doesn't say so, but guilt has a way of making us freeze.

Jacob tells them to go "and we will live and not die." Famine was a matter of life and death. God was using hunger to move this family toward the place where He had already prepared their rescue.

New Testament links: Acts 7:12 (alluded to)

42:3-5 *And the ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt. And Benjamin, the brother of Joseph, Jacob did not send with his brothers, for he said, "Lest harm happen to him." And the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.*

"Ten brothers of Joseph went down." Moses calls them Joseph's brothers here on purpose. The story is now about a family that must face what it did.

Jacob kept Benjamin home. Benjamin was the youngest, and he was Rachel's other son, the only one left after Joseph. Jacob said, "Lest harm happen to him." Jacob's favoritism had not ended. He had simply moved it from Joseph to Benjamin. The other sons must have felt it.

The brothers "came to buy grain among those coming," the crowds of people traveling to Egypt for food. They were just another group of hungry foreigners in line.

New Testament links: Acts 7:11 (alluded to)

42:6-8 *And Joseph, he **was** the ruler over the land; he **was** the one selling grain to all the people of the land. And the brothers of Joseph came and bowed down to him, face to the ground. And Joseph saw his brothers, and he recognized them; and he acted as a stranger to them, and he spoke harsh **things** with them, and he said to them, "From where have you come?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." And Joseph recognized his brothers, and they did not recognize him.*

Joseph was "the ruler over the land," and the brothers "bowed down to him, face to the ground." This is the moment Joseph had dreamed about at seventeen, when the sheaves bowed down to his sheaf (37:5-8). The brothers had mocked that dream and sold him to stop it. Now they fulfilled it without knowing it. People cannot stop what God has said He will do.

Joseph recognized them, "and he acted as a stranger to them, and he spoke harsh things with them." Why didn't they know him? He had been a teenager when they last saw him, and now he was a grown man near forty, shaved like an Egyptian, dressed in royal linen and speaking through an interpreter (42:23). And of course, they thought he was a slave somewhere, or dead.

42:9-14 *And Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them, and he said to them, "You **are** spies! To see the nakedness of the land you have come." And they said to him, "No, my lord, and your servants have come to buy food. All of us **are** sons of one man; we **are** honest; your servants have not been spies." And he said to them, "No, but the nakedness of the land you have come to see." And they said, "Your servants **are** twelve brothers; we **are** the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and look, the youngest **is** with our father today, and the one is not." And Joseph said to them, "It **is** what I spoke to you, saying, 'You **are** spies.'*

"Joseph remembered the dreams." Seeing his brothers face down before him, he understood that God had kept His word.

Then Joseph accused them: "You are spies." Egypt's northeast border faced Canaan, and foreign spies looking for weak spots were a real concern. The brothers protested that they were "honest," all "sons of one man."

That claim must have stung Joseph. Honest men? These were the men who had sold their brother and lied to their father about it for over twenty years.

In their defense they told more than they meant to. They were "twelve brothers," with the youngest at home, "and the one is not." Joseph was standing right in front of them, listening to them say he was dead. He now knew his father and Benjamin were alive.

42:15-17 *By this you will be tested: **by** the life of Pharaoh, you will not go out from here unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him take your brother, and you, be bound, and let your words be tested, whether truth **is** with you; and if not, **by** the life of Pharaoh, surely you **are** spies." And he gathered them into custody **for** three days.*

Joseph set a test. One brother would go home and bring back the youngest, and the rest would stay in prison. "By the life of Pharaoh" was a solemn oath, the way an Egyptian official would swear.

Then Joseph "gathered them into custody for three days," all ten of them. Joseph had spent years in prison because of their sin. Now they got a small taste of it.

Was Joseph taking revenge? I don't believe so. Everything he does in these chapters is aimed at one question: had his brothers changed? Would they treat Benjamin the way they had treated him? Joseph needed to know before he could trust them, and they needed to face what they had done. God was using Joseph's tests to bring them to repentance.

42:18-20 *And Joseph said to them on the third day, "Do this and live; I fear God. If you **are** honest, let one brother of yours be bound in the house of your custody; and you, go, bring grain **for** the hunger of your households. And your youngest brother you will bring to me, and let your words be verified, and you will not die." And they did so.*

On the third day Joseph softened the plan. "Do this and live; I fear God." The brothers didn't know it, but an Egyptian ruler was telling them he served their God.

Now only one brother would stay in prison, and the rest could carry grain home "for the hunger of your households." Joseph was thinking about his father and the hungry families in Canaan. Even while testing his brothers, he was providing for them.

42:21-22 *And they said, each to his brother, "Truly we **are** guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us for favor, and we did not listen. Therefore this distress has come to us." And Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not say to you, saying, 'Do not sin against the boy'? And you did not listen; and also his blood, look, is being required."*

The chapter turns on these two verses. Speaking in Hebrew, thinking the Egyptian couldn't understand, the brothers said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother."

They remembered "the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us." Genesis 37 doesn't tell us that Joseph begged them from the pit, but they never forgot it. For more than twenty years that memory had stayed with them. A guilty conscience can be buried, but it doesn't die.

Reuben added, "Did I not say to you?" He had tried to save Joseph (37:21-22), and now he reminded them, "and also his blood, look, is being required." They believed God was finally calling them to account.

For the first time the brothers confess their sin out loud. God had begun His work in their hearts, and they had stopped making excuses.

42:23-24 *And they did not know that Joseph understood, for the interpreter **was** between them. And he turned away from them, and he wept, and he returned to them, and he spoke to them, and he took Simeon from them, and he bound him before their eyes.*

"They did not know that Joseph understood." He heard every word.

"He turned away from them, and he wept." This is the first of several times Joseph weeps in these chapters (43:30; 45:2, 14-15; 46:29; 50:1, 17). Joseph was not cold or hard. He loved his brothers. Hearing them finally admit their guilt broke his heart.

Then he took Simeon, "and he bound him before their eyes." Why Simeon? We aren't told. Reuben was the oldest, but he had tried to save Joseph. Simeon was next in line, and he had a violent past (34:25). Perhaps Joseph believed he had played a leading part in the plot. Many have suggested this, though we cannot be sure.

42:25-26 *And Joseph commanded, and they filled their vessels **with** grain, and **commanded** to return their silver, each **man's** to his sack, and to give them provisions for the way. And he did so for them. And they lifted their grain onto their donkeys, and they went from there.*

Joseph ordered their bags filled with grain, their money returned to every man's sack and food given for the journey. The brothers had sold Joseph for silver (37:28). Now Joseph secretly gave them their silver back. He was paying for their food himself.

It was an act of grace, though they would not see it that way at first. They loaded their donkeys and left, one brother short.

42:27-28 *And the one opened his sack to give fodder to his donkey at the lodging place, and he saw his silver, and look, it **was** in the mouth of his bag. And he said to his brothers, "My silver has been returned, and also, look, **it is** in my bag." And their heart failed, and they trembled, each to his brother, saying, "What **is** this **that** God has done to us?"*

At a lodging place along the way, one brother opened his sack and found his money. "Their heart failed, and they trembled, each to his brother, saying, 'What is this that God has done to us?'"

This is the first time in this story the brothers have spoken about God. Their guilt had made them see God's hand in everything, and they assumed it was against them.

The money was a gift, but a guilty heart reads kindness as a threat. That is what sin does. It makes us afraid of God even when He is being good to us. The answer is not to run from Him but to confess and come home (1 John 1:9).

42:29-34 *And they came to Jacob their father, to the land of Canaan, and they told him all the **things** that had happened to them, saying, "The man, the lord of the land, spoke harsh **things** with us, and he took us for **men** spying out the land. And we said to him, 'We **are** honest; we have not been spies. We **are** twelve brothers, sons of our father; the one is not, and the youngest **is** today with our father in the land of Canaan.' And the man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I will know that you **are** honest: leave one brother of yours with me, and take **grain for** the hunger of your households, and go. And bring your youngest brother to me, and I will know that you **are** not spies, that you **are** honest. Your brother I will give to you, and you will go about in the land.'"*

Back in Canaan the brothers told Jacob everything. Their report is honest, but they soften some parts. They don't mention the three days in prison, and they don't say that Simeon was bound in front of them.

They called Joseph "the man, the lord of the land" twice. To them he was a frightening stranger who held their lives in his hand. They passed on his terms: bring the youngest brother, and Simeon will be released, and "you will go about in the land."

42:35-36 *And it happened **as** they **were** emptying their sacks, and look, each man's bundle of silver **was** in his sack; and they saw their bundles of silver, they and their father, and they were afraid. And Jacob their father said to them, "Me you have bereaved: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and Benjamin you will take. Upon me all of them have been."*

When they emptied their sacks, "look, each man's bundle of silver was in his sack." Now they were all afraid, and so was their father. It looked as though they had stolen from the lord of Egypt.

Jacob's words are full of pain. "Me you have bereaved: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and Benjamin you will take." Did Jacob suspect his sons in Joseph's disappearance? The text does not say, but his words come close.

"Upon me all of them have been." Jacob looked at his life and saw only loss. In fact, every one of these things was working for him. Joseph was alive. Simeon would be returned. Benjamin would come back safe. The grain was a gift. Jacob was standing at the doorway to the greatest blessing of his old age and could not see it.

We often feel the same way. Paul tells us that "to those who love God all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28). When life looks like it is against you, remember Jacob. You may not see the whole story yet.

42:37-38 *And Reuben said to his father, saying, "My two sons you may put to death if I do not bring him to you. Give him into my hand, and I will bring him back to you." And he said, "My son will not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he alone is left; and harm may happen to him on the way on which you go, and you will bring down my gray hair in sorrow to Sheol."*

Reuben made a wild offer: "My two sons you may put to death if I do not bring him to you." It was a sincere offer, but it made no sense. Would killing two grandsons comfort Jacob for losing a son? Reuben had lost his standing as the firstborn through his sin (35:22), and his father did not trust him.

Jacob refused. "My son will not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he alone is left." Those words, "he alone is left," must have hurt the other sons. Jacob talked as if Benjamin were his only son.

Jacob said that if he lost Benjamin, they would "bring down my gray hair in sorrow to Sheol." He meant it would send him to the grave. For now, Simeon would have to wait in Egypt.

Chapter 42 Summary

When the famine reached Canaan, Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt to buy grain but kept Benjamin home. They bowed before Joseph, fulfilling his dreams, though they did not recognize him. Joseph knew them, spoke harshly, accused them of being spies and put them in prison for three days. He then kept Simeon and sent the others home with grain, ordering them to return with their youngest brother. The brothers admitted to one another that they were guilty for what they had done to Joseph, and Joseph turned away and wept. On the journey home they found their money in their sacks and were afraid. Jacob, grieving Joseph and Simeon, refused to let Benjamin go, even when Reuben offered his own sons as a guarantee.

Chapter 42 Study Questions

1. Jacob kept Benjamin at home (42:4). What does that show about Jacob's favoritism, and how might the other ten sons have felt?

2. How did the brothers' bowing fulfill Joseph's dream? (42:6; 37:5-8)

3. What did Joseph accuse his brothers of being, and how did they answer? (42:9-13)

4. How long did Joseph keep them in prison, and what did he say about God on the third day? (42:17-18)

5. What did the brothers admit to one another, and how did Joseph react? (42:21-24)

6. Joseph tested his brothers before he told them who he was (42:15-20, 24). Why do you think he did this, and what does it show about the difference between forgiving someone and trusting them again?

7. What did the brothers find in their sacks, and how did they respond? (42:27-28, 35)

8. Why did Jacob refuse to send Benjamin? (42:36-38)

9. The brothers carried their guilt for over twenty years. Is there an old sin you have never brought to God? What does 1 John 1:9 promise?

10. Jacob said, "Upon me all of them have been," when God was working for him. How can you hold on to Romans 8:28 when life feels like it is against you?

Chapter 43: The Second Journey

Scripture

43:1-14 And the famine ***was*** heavy in the land. And it happened, when they had finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, and their father said to them, "Go back; buy a little food for us." And Judah said to him, saying, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You will not see my face unless your brother ***is*** with you.' If you are sending our brother with us, we will go down, and we will buy food for you. And if you are not sending ***him***, we will not go down; for the man said to us, 'You will not see my face unless your brother ***is*** with you.'" And Israel said, "Why did you do evil to me by telling the man whether you still ***had*** a brother?" And they said, "The man asked closely about us and about our kindred, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Do you have a brother?' And we told him according to these words. Could we really know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down'?" And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the young man with me, and let us arise and go, and we will live and not die, both we and you and our little ones. I, I will be surety for him; from my hand you may require him. If I do not bring him to you and set him before you, then I will have sinned against you all the days. For if we had not delayed, surely now we would have returned these two times." And Israel their father said to them, "If so, then, do this: take from the choicest of the land in your vessels, and take down to the man a gift: a little balm and a little honey, gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. And take double silver in your hand; and the silver that was returned in the mouth of your bags you will take back in your hand; perhaps it ***was*** a mistake. And take your brother, and arise, go back to the man. And may God Almighty give you compassion before the man, and he will release to you your other brother and Benjamin. And I, as I am bereaved, I am bereaved."

43:15-25 And the men took this gift, and they took double silver in their hand, and Benjamin; and they arose and went down ***to*** Egypt, and they stood before Joseph. And Joseph saw Benjamin with them, and he said to the one who ***was*** over his house, "Bring the men into the house, and slaughter a slaughter and prepare ***it***; for the men will eat with me at noon." And the man did as Joseph said, and the man brought the men into the house of Joseph. And the men were afraid, because they were brought ***into*** the house of Joseph; and they said, "On account of the silver that returned in our bags at the first, we are being brought in, to roll himself upon us and to fall upon us, and to take us for slaves, and our donkeys." And they approached the man who ***was*** over the house of Joseph, and they spoke to him ***at*** the entrance of the house. And they said, "Please, my lord, we surely came down at the first to buy food. And it happened, when we came to the lodging place, and we opened our bags, and look, each man's silver ***was*** in the mouth of his bag, our silver in its weight; and we have brought it back in our hand. And other silver we have brought down in our hand to buy food. We do not know who put our silver in our bags." And he said, "Peace ***be*** to you; do not fear. Your God and the God of your father gave you treasure in your bags; your silver came to me." And he brought Simeon out to them. And the man brought the men into the house of Joseph, and he gave water, and they washed their feet; and he gave fodder to their donkeys. And they prepared the gift until Joseph came at noon, for they had heard that there they would eat bread.

43:26-34 And Joseph came into the house, and they brought to him the gift which ***was*** in their hand into the house, and they bowed down to him to the ground. And he asked them about ***their*** welfare, and he said, "***Is*** your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? ***Is*** he still alive?" And they said, "Your servant, our father, ***is*** well; he ***is*** still alive." And they bowed low, and they bowed down. And he lifted up his eyes and saw Benjamin his brother, the son of his mother, and he said, "***Is*** this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he said, "May God be gracious to you, my son." And Joseph hurried, for his compassion grew warm toward his brother, and he sought to weep; and he went into the inner room, and he wept there. And he washed his face and came out, and he restrained himself, and he said, "Set ***out*** bread." And they set for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; for the Egyptians were not able to eat bread with the Hebrews, for it ***is*** an abomination to Egypt. And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth; and the men looked at one another in astonishment, each to his neighbor. And he carried portions from before him to them, and the portion of Benjamin was greater than the portions of all of them, five times. And they drank, and they became drunk with him.

Chapter 43 Preview

The famine does not let up, and the grain from Egypt runs out. Jacob tells his sons to go back, but Judah reminds him of the man's warning: they cannot see his face without Benjamin. Judah steps forward and promises to take the blame forever if he does not bring Benjamin home. At last Jacob lets him go, sending gifts, double money and a prayer to God Almighty.

In Egypt, the brothers are brought to Joseph's house and are sure they are about to be made slaves. Instead the steward speaks kindly, brings Simeon out and prepares a meal. When Joseph sees Benjamin, his own mother's son, he has to leave the room to weep. Then he seats the brothers in order of their ages and gives Benjamin five times as much food as anyone else. Joseph is watching to see how they will treat the favored younger brother this time.

Chapter 43 Study

43:1-2 *And the famine **was** heavy in the land. And it happened, when they had finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, and their father said to them, "Go back; buy a little food for us."*

"The famine was heavy in the land." Hunger forced the issue. Jacob could refuse to send Benjamin, but he could not refuse to eat.

Jacob said, "Go back; buy a little food." That word "little" shows his denial. He wanted to treat this like an ordinary shopping trip and avoid the real issue. His sons knew they could not go back without Benjamin.

God sometimes lets pressure build in our lives until we finally face what we have been avoiding. The famine was hard, but it was moving this family toward healing.

43:3-5 *And Judah said to him, saying, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You will not see my face unless your brother **is** with you.' If you are sending our brother with us, we will go down, and we will buy food for you. And if you are not sending **him**, we will not go down; for the man said to us, 'You will not see my face unless your brother **is** with you.'"*

Judah now speaks for the brothers, and from here on he takes the lead. This is the same Judah who suggested selling Joseph (37:26-27) and who sinned with Tamar (chapter 38). But in chapter 38 Judah finally admitted his wrong and said, "She is more righteous than I" (38:26). God had begun changing him.

Judah is respectful but firm. The man "solemnly warned us." They would not see his face without their brother. Going back without Benjamin would be pointless and dangerous. Judah does not argue with his father's grief. He simply tells the truth.

43:6-7 *And Israel said, "Why did you do evil to me by telling the man whether you still **had** a brother?" And they said, "The man asked closely about us and about our kindred, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Do you have a brother?' And we told him according to these words. Could we really know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down'?"*

Jacob is called "Israel" in verse 6. That is the new name God gave him (32:28), and it marks him as the man who carries God's covenant promises. He complains, "Why did you do evil to me by telling the man whether you still had a brother?"

The brothers explain that the man asked direct questions about their family: "Is your father still alive? Do you have a brother?" They answered honestly. How could they know he would demand Benjamin?

These men are changing. They had once covered their sin with a bloody robe and a lie (37:31-33). Now they are being honest, even when honesty costs them.

43:8-10 *And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the young man with me, and let us arise and go, and we will live and not die, both we and you and our little ones. I, I will be surety for him; from my hand you may require him. If I do not bring him to you and set him before you, then I will have sinned against you all the days. For if we had not delayed, surely now we would have returned these two times."*

Judah makes his pledge. "I, I will be surety for him; from my hand you may require him." Judah was offering himself as surety, a guarantee backed by his own life. If the person fails, you pay. Judah was asking his father to put Benjamin's life on his account.

If he did not, "then I will have sinned against you all the days." Judah would carry the guilt for the rest of his life if anything happened to Benjamin. Compare this with Reuben's offer in 42:37. Reuben offered his sons. Judah offered himself.

Judah once sold his brother for silver. Now he puts himself on the line for his brother.

Judah is the ancestor of King David and of Jesus (Matthew 1:2-3; Hebrews 7:14). Many see in Judah's pledge a faint picture of Christ, who became the guarantee of a better covenant (Hebrews 7:22) and took our blame on Himself.

Judah adds, "if we had not delayed, surely now we would have returned these two times." Jacob's fear had cost them time, and possibly Simeon's comfort in prison.

43:11-14 *And Israel their father said to them, "If so, then, do this: take from the choicest of the land in your vessels, and take down to the man a gift: a little balm and a little honey, gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. And take double silver in your hand; and the silver that was returned in the mouth of your bags you will take back in your hand; perhaps it **was** a mistake. And take your brother, and arise, go back to the man. And may God Almighty give you compassion before the man, and he will release to you your other brother and Benjamin. And I, as I am bereaved, I am bereaved."*

Jacob finally gave in. "If so, then, do this." He became practical. Send a present to the man: "a little balm and a little honey, gum and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds." Balm was a healing resin. Myrrh was a sweet-smelling resin used in perfume. These were the luxury goods of Canaan. Even in a famine, some of these could still be found. It is striking that Ishmaelite traders were carrying balm and myrrh to Egypt when they bought Joseph (37:25).

Jacob also sent "double silver," enough to pay back what was found in the sacks and to buy more. "Perhaps it was a mistake." Jacob wanted his sons to be honest.

Then Jacob prayed: "may God Almighty give you compassion before the man." "God Almighty" is El Shaddai, the name we met at 17:1 and 35:11. Jacob turned back to the God of the promises.

He ended, "as I am bereaved, I am bereaved." That is a surrender. Jacob had held on to Benjamin with all his strength. Now he opened his hands and placed him in God's care. Sometimes the hardest step of faith is letting go of the thing we fear losing most.

43:15-17 *And the men took this gift, and they took double silver in their hand, and Benjamin; and they arose and went down **to** Egypt, and they stood before Joseph. And Joseph saw Benjamin with them, and he said to the one who **was** over his house, "Bring the men into the house, and slaughter a slaughter and prepare **it**; for the men will eat with me at noon." And the man did as Joseph said, and the man brought the men into the house of Joseph.*

The brothers went down with the present, the double money and Benjamin, "and they stood before Joseph." Moses is silent about what Joseph felt when he first saw Benjamin across the room, but his order says enough. He told his steward, "Bring the men into the house, and slaughter a slaughter and prepare it; for the men will eat with me at noon."

A steward was the man in charge of a household, its servants and its business. Joseph had once been the steward of Potiphar's house (39:4). Now he had a steward of his own.

43:18 *And the men were afraid, because they were brought **into** the house of Joseph; and they said, "On account of the silver that returned in our bags at the first, we are being brought in, to roll himself upon us and to fall upon us, and to take us for slaves, and our donkeys."*

The brothers were terrified. Being taken into the governor's private house did not seem like an honor to them. It seemed like a trap. They thought it was "on account of the silver" and that the man wanted to "roll himself upon us and to fall upon us, and to take us for slaves, and our donkeys."

Guilt colors everything. They had sold their brother as a slave. Now they feared becoming slaves themselves. They expected to reap what they had sown.

43:19-23 *And they approached the man who **was** over the house of Joseph, and they spoke to him **at** the entrance of the house. And they said, "Please, my lord, we surely came down at the first to buy food. And it happened, when we came to the lodging place, and we opened our bags, and look, each man's silver **was** in the mouth of his bag, our silver in its weight; and we have brought it back in our hand. And other silver we have brought down in our hand to buy food. We do not know who put our silver in our bags." And he said, "Peace **be** to you; do not fear. Your God and the God of your father gave you treasure in your bags; your silver came to me." And he brought Simeon out to them.*

Before they even got through the door, they rushed to explain to the steward. They had found their money in their sacks, they had brought it back and they had brought more to buy food. "We do not know who put our silver in our bags."

The steward's answer must have stunned them. "Peace be to you; do not fear. Your God and the God of your father gave you treasure in your bags; your silver came to me." The steward knew about their God. Perhaps Joseph had taught him. And he gave God the credit for their returned money.

Then "he brought Simeon out to them." The brother they had left in chains walked out free.

They came expecting punishment and received peace, a gift and a returned brother. That is a small picture of grace. We come to God afraid, with our hands full of what we hope will pay Him back, and He says, "do not fear."

43:24-25 *And the man brought the men into the house of Joseph, and he gave water, and they washed their feet; and he gave fodder to their donkeys. And they prepared the gift until Joseph came at noon, for they had heard that there they would eat bread.*

The steward "gave water, and they washed their feet." In that part of the world people wore sandals on dusty roads, and washing a guest's feet was an act of hospitality. Their donkeys were fed too. They were treated as honored guests, not prisoners.

They "prepared the gift until Joseph came at noon." They still didn't understand what was going on, but they had heard they would eat a meal with the governor.

43:26-28 *And Joseph came into the house, and they brought to him the gift which **was** in their hand into the house, and they bowed down to him to the ground. And he asked them about **their** welfare, and he said, "**Is** your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? **Is** he still alive?" And they said, "Your servant, our father, **is** well; he **is** still alive." And they bowed low, and they bowed down.*

When Joseph came home, the brothers brought the gifts and "bowed down to him to the ground." Then "they bowed low, and they bowed down." Joseph's dream of the eleven stars bowing to him (37:9) was coming true. All eleven brothers were now before him.

Joseph asked about their welfare, and then the question nearest his heart: "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" Twenty-two years had passed. Joseph longed to know.

"Your servant, our father, is well," they answered; "he is still alive." Jacob was being called Joseph's servant, another fulfillment of the dream (37:10), though the brothers had no idea.

43:29-30 *And he lifted up his eyes and saw Benjamin his brother, the son of his mother, and he said, "**Is** this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he said, "May God be gracious to you, my son." And Joseph hurried, for his compassion grew warm toward his brother, and he sought to weep; and he went into the inner room, and he wept there.*

Then Joseph "saw Benjamin his brother, the son of his mother." The other ten were half brothers. Benjamin was his full brother, the only other son of Rachel. Benjamin had been a small child when Joseph was taken. Now he was a grown man.

Joseph said, "May God be gracious to you, my son." It was a blessing, from a man of authority to a younger man.

Then Joseph hurried out, "for his compassion grew warm toward his brother, and he sought to weep; and he went into the inner room, and he wept there." Joseph was a powerful ruler, but he had a tender heart. Strength and tears are not opposites. Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35). Godly men can cry.

43:31-32 *And he washed his face and came out, and he restrained himself, and he said, "Set **out** bread." And they set for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; for the Egyptians were not able to eat bread with the Hebrews, for it **is** an abomination to Egypt.*

Joseph "washed his face and came out, and he restrained himself, and he said, 'Set out bread.'"

The seating had three groups: Joseph alone, the brothers together and the Egyptians at their own table. Joseph sat apart because of his rank. The Egyptians would not eat with the Hebrews, "for it is an abomination to Egypt." They considered it shameful to share a meal with foreigners, especially shepherds (46:34). This separation will matter later. Because the Egyptians kept apart from them, Israel could live in Goshen as a distinct people and not be swallowed up by Egyptian culture.

43:33 *And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth; and the men looked at one another in astonishment, each to his neighbor.*

The brothers were seated "the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth." Somehow this Egyptian had arranged them in exact birth order, from Reuben down to Benjamin.

"The men looked at one another in astonishment." The odds of guessing the order of eleven brothers by chance are tiny. How could he know? They were being shown, little by little, that this man knew more about them than they could explain.

43:34 *And he carried portions from before him to them, and the portion of Benjamin was greater than the portions of all of them, five times. And they drank, and they became drunk with him.*

Joseph sent them food from his own table, but "the portion of Benjamin was greater than the portions of all of them, five times."

This was a test. Years before, the brothers had hated Joseph because their father favored him (37:4). Now Joseph openly favored Benjamin, the other son of Rachel. Would they grow jealous again? Would they resent him?

They did not. "And they drank, and they became drunk with him." They relaxed and enjoyed the meal. They seemed to be different men. But Joseph had one more test for them, the hardest one, in the next chapter.

Chapter 43 Summary

When the grain from Egypt ran out, Jacob told his sons to go back, but Judah reminded him they could not see the man without Benjamin. Judah offered himself as surety for Benjamin, promising to bear the blame forever if he did not bring him back. Jacob finally agreed, sending a present, double money and a prayer to God Almighty, and surrendered Benjamin to God's care. In Egypt, the brothers were brought to Joseph's house and feared they would be made slaves, but the steward told them not to be afraid, said their God had given them treasure and released Simeon. When Joseph saw Benjamin, he was so moved that he left to weep in private. At the meal Joseph seated the brothers in exact birth order and gave Benjamin five times as much as the others, and the brothers ate with him without jealousy.

Chapter 43 Study Questions

1. Jacob told his sons to buy "a little food" (43:2), as if nothing were wrong. Why do you think he avoided the real issue, and how do we sometimes do the same?

2. What did Judah promise his father? How was it different from Reuben's offer? (43:8-9; 42:37)

3. What did Jacob send with his sons, and what did he pray? (43:11-14)

4. The brothers feared they would be made slaves (43:18). How did their old guilt shape the way they read what was happening to them?

5. The steward said, "do not fear," and gave God the credit for their money (43:23). How is this a picture of the way God meets us when we come to Him afraid?

6. How did Joseph react when he saw Benjamin? (43:29-30)

7. Why did the Egyptians eat separately from the Hebrews? (43:32)

8. What astonished the brothers at the meal, and how was Benjamin treated? (43:33-34)

9. Jacob finally said, "as I am bereaved, I am bereaved." Is there something you are holding too tightly that you need to place in God's hands?

10. Judah went from selling his brother to offering himself for his brother. What does his change tell you about what God can do in a person's heart?

Chapter 44: The Silver Cup

Scripture

44:1-17 And he commanded the one who ***was*** over his house, saying, "Fill the bags of the men ***with*** food, as much as they are able to carry, and put each man's silver in the mouth of his bag. And my cup, the cup of silver, you will put in the mouth of the bag of the youngest, and the silver of his grain." And he did according to the word of Joseph which he had spoken. The morning became light, and the men were sent away, they and their donkeys. They had gone out of the city; they had not gone far, and Joseph said to the one who ***was*** over his house, "Arise, pursue after the men; and you will overtake them, and you will say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good? not this ***the one*** from which my lord drinks, and he surely divines by it? You have done evil ***in*** what you have done.'" And he overtook them, and he spoke these words to them. And they said to him, "Why does my lord speak according to these words? Far be it from your servants to do according to this thing. Look, the silver which we found in the mouth of our bags we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; and how would we steal silver or gold from the house of your lord? With whomever of your servants it is found, then he will die; and also we will be slaves to my lord." And he said, "Now also according to your words, so it ***is***: ***the one*** with whom it is found will be a slave to me, and you will be innocent." And they hurried, and they brought down each man his bag to the ground, and they opened each man his bag. And he searched; with the oldest he began, and with the youngest he finished; and the cup was found in the bag of Benjamin. And they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey, and they went back to the city. And Judah and his brothers came into the house of Joseph, and he ***was*** still there; and they fell before him to the ground. And Joseph said to them, "What ***is*** this deed which you have done? Did you not know that a man who ***is*** like me surely divines?" And Judah said, "What will we say to my lord? What will we speak? And how will we justify ourselves? God has found the iniquity of your servants. Look, we ***are*** slaves to my lord, both we and ***he*** in whose hand the cup was found." And he said, "Far be it from me to do this. The man in whose hand the cup was found, he will be a slave to me; and you, go up in peace to your father."

44:18-34 And Judah drew near to him, and he said, "Please, my lord, let your servant speak, please, a word in the ears of my lord, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you ***are*** like Pharaoh. My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' And we said to my lord, 'We have an old father, and a young child of ***his*** old age; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him.' And you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, and let me set my eye on him.' And we said to my lord, 'The young man is not able to leave his father; and ***if*** he leaves his father, then he will die.' And you said to your servants, 'If your youngest brother does not come down with you, you will not again see my face.' And it happened, when we went up to your servant my father, and we told him the words of my lord. And our father said, 'Go back; buy a little food for us.' And we said, 'We are not able to go down. If our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we will not be able to see the face of the man, and our youngest brother is not with us.' And your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore two ***sons*** to me. And the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he has been torn, torn to pieces," and I have not seen him until now. And ***if*** you take also this ***one*** from my

presence, and harm happens to him, then you will bring down my gray hair in calamity to Sheol.' And now, when I come to your servant my father, and the young man is not with us, and his soul ***is*** bound up with his soul, and it will happen, when he sees that the young man is not, then he will die; and your servants will bring down the gray hair of your servant our father in sorrow to Sheol. For your servant became surety for the young man to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him to you, then I will have sinned against my father all the days.' And now, please let your servant remain instead of the young man ***as*** a slave to my lord, and let the young man go up with his brothers. For how will I go up to my father, and the young man is not with me? Lest I see the calamity that will find my father."

Chapter 44 Preview

Joseph has one last test for his brothers. He sends them home with full sacks, but he has his own silver cup hidden in Benjamin's sack. His steward chases them down and finds the cup exactly where Joseph planted it. The brothers could leave Benjamin behind and go home free, just as they once let Joseph be carried off. Instead they tear their clothes and go back together.

Then Judah steps forward and makes a long and moving plea. He tells the whole story of their father's love for Benjamin and his grief over his lost son. He ends by begging to stay as a slave in Benjamin's place. The man who once sold one brother into slavery now offers to become a slave to save another. Joseph has his answer. His brothers have changed.

Chapter 44 Study

44:1-2 *And he commanded the one who **was** over his house, saying, "Fill the bags of the men **with** food, as much as they are able to carry, and put each man's silver in the mouth of his bag. And my cup, the cup of silver, you will put in the mouth of the bag of the youngest, and the silver of his grain." And he did according to the word of Joseph which he had spoken.*

Joseph gave his steward careful orders. Fill the men's sacks with as much food "as they are able to carry," return each man's money again, and put "my cup, the cup of silver," in the sack of the youngest.

Why go to such lengths? Joseph was setting up a situation very much like the day he was sold. Once again a favored son of Rachel would be in danger, and once again the brothers would have a chance to walk away and save themselves. Joseph wanted to see what they would do this time.

44:3-5 *The morning became light, and the men were sent away, they and their donkeys. They had gone out of the city; they had not gone far, and Joseph said to the one who **was** over his house, "Arise, pursue after the men; and you will overtake them, and you will say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good? **Is** not this **the one** from which my lord drinks, and he surely divines by it? You have done evil **in** what you have done.'"*

At first light the brothers left for home, happy, with Simeon and Benjamin both safe and full sacks on their donkeys. They had hardly left the city when the steward caught up with them. "Why have you repaid evil for good?"

The cup was "the one from which my lord drinks, and he surely divines by it." Divination was the practice of trying to learn secret things or the future through signs. In the ancient Near East one known method, described in Babylonian texts, was to pour oil onto water in a cup and read the shapes it made. God's Law later forbids divination for His people (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

Did Joseph practice divination? I don't believe so. Joseph even says it himself in verse 15: "a man who is like me surely divines." But that is part of his disguise. Everywhere else he insists that understanding comes from God (40:8; 41:16). The steward is speaking the way an Egyptian official would be expected to speak, and Joseph was still playing the role of a stranger. The words were part of the test, meant to make the brothers believe this man could uncover anything.

44:6-10 *And he overtook them, and he spoke these words to them. And they said to him, "Why does my lord speak according to these words? Far be it from your servants to do according to this thing. Look, the silver which we found in the mouth of our bags we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; and how would we steal silver or gold from the house of your lord? With whomever of your servants it is found, then he will die; and also we will be slaves to my lord." And he said, "Now also according to your words, so it* ***is****:* ***the one*** *with whom it is found will be a slave to me, and you will be innocent."*

The brothers were shocked. "Far be it from your servants to do according to this thing." They pointed out that they had brought back the money they found the first time. Why would they steal silver now?

They were so sure of their innocence that they made a rash vow: whoever has the cup "he will die," and the rest of us will be slaves. That kind of promise is dangerous. Jacob made a similar one to Laban, not knowing Rachel had stolen her father's idols (31:32).

The steward agreed, but he softened the terms. Only the one with the cup would be a slave, "and you will be innocent." This was the test. The others would be free to go.

44:11-13 *And they hurried, and they brought down each man his bag to the ground, and they opened each man his bag. And he searched; with the oldest he began, and with the youngest he finished; and the cup was found in the bag of Benjamin. And they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey, and they went back to the city.*

They quickly lowered their sacks to the ground. The steward searched: "with the oldest he began, and with the youngest he finished." Every sack was clean, one after another, and the tension grew with each one. Then, in the last sack, "the cup was found in the bag of Benjamin."

"They tore their clothes." Tearing your clothes was a sign of deep grief and horror. Years before, Jacob tore his clothes when he saw Joseph's bloody robe (37:34). Now the brothers tore theirs over Benjamin.

Then comes the key line: they loaded their donkeys, and "went back to the city." Every one of them. Nobody went home. The steward had told them they were free to leave, and none of them did. They would not abandon their brother. Twenty-two years earlier they sold a brother and went home. This time they stood with one.

44:14-15 *And Judah and his brothers came into the house of Joseph, and he **was** still there; and they fell before him to the ground. And Joseph said to them, "What **is** this deed which you have done? Did you not know that a man who **is** like me surely divines?"*

Judah is named first. "Judah and his brothers came into the house of Joseph." He has become their leader. They "fell before him to the ground," bowing before him yet again.

Joseph pressed them: "What is this deed which you have done?" He spoke as if he knew everything, keeping up the role of a man who could find out any secret.

44:16 *And Judah said, "What will we say to my lord? What will we speak? And how will we justify ourselves? God has found the iniquity of your servants. Look, we **are** slaves to my lord, both we and **he** in whose hand the cup was found."*

Judah does not argue. "What will we say to my lord?" he replied. "What will we speak? And how will we justify ourselves?" He has no defense to offer.

Then he says something deeper: "God has found the iniquity of your servants." Iniquity is guilt, crooked wrongdoing. Judah knew they had not stolen the cup. But he believed God was finally dealing with their real sin, what they had done to Joseph. The hidden guilt of twenty-two years had caught up with them.

And Judah offered all of them as slaves, "both we and he in whose hand the cup was found." They would not let Benjamin go alone.

Judah does not make excuses. He does not blame Benjamin. He accepts God's judgment. "Know your sin, that it will find you" is how Moses later put it (Numbers 32:23), and Judah now knew it was true.

44:17 *And he said, "Far be it from me to do this. The man in whose hand the cup was found, he will be a slave to me; and you, go up in peace to your father."*

Joseph would not accept it. "Far be it from me to do this." Only the man with the cup would be a slave. To the rest he said, "and you, go up in peace to your father."

This was the heart of the test. The road home was open. All they had to do was leave Benjamin behind. Their father's favorite would be gone, and there would be no one to blame but Benjamin. It was the same choice they faced at the pit in Dothan. What would they do now?

44:18 *And Judah drew near to him, and he said, "Please, my lord, let your servant speak, please, a word in the ears of my lord, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you **are** like Pharaoh.*

Judah came near. "Please, my lord, let your servant speak, please, a word in the ears of my lord." He knew the danger. "You are like Pharaoh." One word from this man could end Judah's life. Yet he spoke anyway.

Real courage is often quiet and humble. Judah did not demand or threaten. He pleaded.

44:19-23 *My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' And we said to my lord, 'We have an old father, and a young child of **his** old age; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him.' And you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, and let me set my eye on him.' And we said to my lord, 'The young man is not able to leave his father; and **if** he leaves his father, then he will die.' And you said to your servants, 'If your youngest brother does not come down with you, you will not again see my face.'*

Judah began by retelling the story. The lord had asked about their family. They had told him of "an old father, and a young child of his old age." Benjamin was the son of Jacob's old age, as Joseph had been (37:3).

Then Judah said, "his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him." Judah said it plainly, without bitterness. Their father loved Benjamin in a special way. Once that kind of favoritism filled the brothers with hatred. Now Judah simply accepted it.

They had warned the lord that the lad could not leave his father, "if he leaves his father, then he will die." But the lord had insisted.

44:24-29 *And it happened, when we went up to your servant my father, and we told him the words of my lord. And our father said, 'Go back; buy a little food for us.' And we said, 'We are not able to go down. If our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we will not be able to see the face of the man, and our youngest brother is not with us.' And your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore two **sons** to me. And the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he has been torn, torn to pieces," and I have not seen him until now. And **if** you take also this **one** from my presence, and harm happens to him, then you will bring down my gray hair in calamity to Sheol.'*

Judah described the scene back home, quoting his father's own words. "You know that my wife bore two sons to me." My wife. Jacob meant Rachel. That one sentence showed how Jacob had always seen things. Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah, and their sons, were not counted in his heart the same way.

"The one went out from me, and I said, 'Surely he has been torn, torn to pieces.'" Judah repeated the lie the brothers had let Jacob believe. Joseph was hearing, for the first time, how his father had grieved for him.

"And if you take also this one from my presence," Jacob had said, "then you will bring down my gray hair in calamity to Sheol." Losing Benjamin would kill Jacob.

44:30-32 *And now, when I come to your servant my father, and the young man is not with us, and his soul **is** bound up with his soul, and it will happen, when he sees that the young man is not, then he will die; and your servants will bring down the gray hair of your servant our father in sorrow to Sheol. For your servant became surety for the young man to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him to you, then I will have sinned against my father all the days.'*

Judah spelled it out. Jacob's "soul is bound up with his soul." If Benjamin did not come back, Jacob would die, and the brothers would be to blame.

And Judah had made a personal promise. "Your servant became surety for the young man to my father." He had pledged himself (43:9). He meant to keep his word.

44:33-34 *And now, please let your servant remain instead of the young man **as** a slave to my lord, and let the young man go up with his brothers. For how will I go up to my father, and the young man is not with me? Lest I see the calamity that will find my father."*

Now Judah made his request. "Please let your servant remain instead of the young man as a slave to my lord, and let the young man go up with his brothers."

This is the turning point of the whole Joseph story. Judah offered himself in place of his brother. He would give up his own freedom, his family, his home, everything, so that Benjamin could go free and his father would not die of grief.

"How will I go up to my father, and the young man is not with me?" Judah could not bear to see his father's pain again. Twenty-two years before, the brothers had watched their father weep over Joseph's robe and said nothing. Now Judah would rather be a slave than cause his father that grief again.

Many see here a beautiful picture of Christ. Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5), came from this man's family line. Like Judah, He offered Himself as a substitute, taking the place of the guilty so that they could go free. Judah offered to be a slave. Jesus did more. He gave His life (Mark 10:45).

Chapter 44 Summary

Joseph had his silver cup hidden in Benjamin's sack, then sent his steward after the brothers to accuse them of theft. The brothers protested their innocence, but the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. They tore their clothes and all returned to the city together. Judah confessed that God had found out their iniquity and offered them all as slaves. When Joseph said only Benjamin must stay, Judah pleaded with him, describing their father's love for Benjamin and the grief that losing him would bring. Judah offered to remain as a slave in Benjamin's place so the boy could return to his father. The brothers who once sold Joseph would no longer abandon a brother.

Chapter 44 Study Questions

1. Joseph set up a situation much like the day he was sold (44:1-2, 17). Why do you think he tested his brothers this way?

2. What rash promise did the brothers make when they were accused? (44:9)

3. Joseph's steward said Joseph used the cup for divination, and Joseph said it himself (44:5, 15). Why do you think he said this, and what does the rest of his story show about where he believed wisdom comes from?

4. When the cup was found, the brothers were free to go home, but they all went back to the city (44:13, 17). What does that show about how they had changed?

5. What did Judah mean when he said, "God has found the iniquity of your servants"? (44:16)

6. What offer did Joseph make to the other brothers? Why was this a test? (44:17)

7. What did Judah tell Joseph about their father's love for Benjamin? (44:20, 27-31)

8. What did Judah ask to do in the end? (44:33)

9. Judah took responsibility instead of making excuses. Why is it so hard for us to say, "How will we justify ourselves?" and why does it matter?

10. Judah offered himself in his brother's place. How does that help you understand what Jesus did for you?

Chapter 45: Joseph Reveals Himself

Scripture

45:1-15 And Joseph was not able to restrain himself before all those standing by him, and he called out, "Make every man go out from me!" And no man stood with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he gave his voice in weeping, and Egypt heard, and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said to his brothers, "I ***am*** Joseph. ***Is*** my father still alive?" And his brothers were not able to answer him, for they were terrified before him. And Joseph said to his brothers, "Draw near to me, please." And they drew near. And he said, "I ***am*** Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. And now, do not be grieved, and let it not burn in your eyes that you sold me here; because for preservation of life God sent me before you. For these two years the famine ***has been*** in the midst of the land, and ***there are*** still five years in which there is neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to set for you a remnant on the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. And now, ***it was*** not you ***who*** sent me here, but God; and He has appointed me as a father to Pharaoh, and as lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father, and you will say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph: "God has appointed me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not delay. And you will dwell in the land of Goshen, and you will be near to me, you and your sons and the sons of your sons, and your flock and your herd and all that you have. And I will provide for you there, for ***there are*** still five years of famine, lest you become impoverished, you and your household and all that you have."' And look, your eyes are seeing, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that ***it is*** my mouth that is speaking to you. And you will tell my father all my glory in Egypt and all that you have seen; and you will hurry, and you will bring my father down here." And he fell on the neck of Benjamin his brother, and he wept; and Benjamin wept on his neck. And he kissed all his brothers, and he wept over them; and after that his brothers spoke with him.

45:16-28 And the report was heard ***in*** the house of Pharaoh, saying, "The brothers of Joseph have come." And it was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your animals and go, come into the land of Canaan, and take your father and your households, and come to me; and let me give you the good of the land of Egypt, and eat the fat of the land.' And you, you are commanded: 'Do this: take for yourselves from the land of Egypt carts for your little ones and for your wives, and you will carry your father, and you will come. And let your eye not pity your goods, for the good of all the land of Egypt, it ***is*** yours.'" And the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them carts at the command of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the way. To all of them he gave, to each man, changes of clothes; and to Benjamin he gave three hundred ***pieces*** of silver and five changes of clothes. And to his father he sent like this: ten donkeys carrying some of the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys carrying grain and bread and sustenance for his father for the way. And he sent his brothers away, and they went; and he said to them, "Do not be stirred up on the way." And they went up from Egypt, and they came ***to*** the land of Canaan, to Jacob their father. And they told him, saying, "Joseph ***is*** still alive, and indeed he ***is*** ruling over all the land of Egypt." And his heart grew numb, for he did not believe them. And they spoke to him all the words of Joseph which he had spoken to them, and he saw the carts which Joseph had sent to carry him; and the spirit of

Jacob their father revived. And Israel said, "Enough! Joseph my son ***is*** still alive. Let me go and see him before I die."

Chapter 45 Preview

Judah's plea breaks Joseph's heart. He sends everyone else out of the room and cries so loudly that the whole house of Pharaoh hears. Then he says the words his brothers never expected to hear: "I am Joseph!" They are too terrified to answer. But Joseph does not punish them. He tells them not to be grieved or angry with themselves, because God sent him ahead of them to save lives.

Joseph tells his brothers to hurry home and bring their father and all their families down to Egypt, where he will take care of them through the five years of famine still to come. Pharaoh gladly agrees and sends wagons. When the brothers tell Jacob that Joseph is alive and ruling Egypt, the old man cannot believe it. Then he sees the wagons, and his spirit comes back to life.

Chapter 45 Study

45:1-2 *And Joseph was not able to restrain himself before all those standing by him, and he called out, "Make every man go out from me!" And no man stood with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he gave his voice in weeping, and Egypt heard, and the house of Pharaoh heard.*

"Joseph was not able to restrain himself." For two chapters he had held back his feelings while he tested his brothers. Judah's words about their father and his offer to take Benjamin's place broke through.

"Make every man go out from me!" Joseph wanted this moment to be private. The Egyptians did not need to hear the story of what the brothers had done. Joseph protected his brothers' shame even as he revealed himself. Love "will cover a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

Then "he gave his voice in weeping, and Egypt heard, and the house of Pharaoh heard." These were not polite tears. Twenty-two years of sorrow came pouring out.

New Testament links: Acts 7:13 (alluded to)

45:3 *And Joseph said to his brothers, "I **am** Joseph. **Is** my father still alive?" And his brothers were not able to answer him, for they were terrified before him.*

"I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" Joseph spoke in Hebrew now, with no interpreter. Judah had just told him his father was alive, but Joseph asked anyway. It was the cry of a son who had longed for his father for twenty-two years.

"And his brothers were not able to answer him, for they were terrified before him." They were shaken with fear and shock. The brother they sold was standing in front of them, and he held their lives in his hands. Every wrong they had done to him came rushing back.

45:4 *And Joseph said to his brothers, "Draw near to me, please." And they drew near. And he said, "I **am** Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.*

"Draw near to me, please." Joseph did not push them away. He drew them near. They had kept their distance in fear, and he invited them to come close.

Then he said it again, more fully: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt." Joseph did not pretend the sin had not happened. He named it plainly. Forgiveness does not mean saying the wrong was not wrong. It means facing it honestly and choosing not to hold it against the one who did it.

45:5 *And now, do not be grieved, and let it not burn in your eyes that you sold me here; because for preservation of life God sent me before you.*

We come now to the heart of the chapter. "Now, do not be grieved, and let it not burn in your eyes that you sold me here; because for preservation of life God sent me before you."

Joseph holds two things together. "You sold me here." That was their choice and their sin. "God sent me." That was God's plan and God's purpose. Both are true at the same time. God was not the author of their evil, but He ruled over it and used it to save many lives.

That is how Joseph could forgive. He did not deny the wrong. He saw that the wrong was not the final word. God was. When you look at what others have done to you, you will either see only their sin, or you will also see God's hand. The second way leads to freedom.

One caution. Forgiving someone is not the same as trusting them again. Joseph forgave, but he did not make himself known until he had seen over time that his brothers had changed (chapters 42 to 44). If someone has abused you, you can release them to God and still keep yourself safe. Forgiveness is yours to give. Trust has to be earned.

45:6-7 *For these two years the famine **has been** in the midst of the land, and **there are** still five years in which there is neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to set for you a remnant on the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.*

Joseph explained the timing. The famine had lasted "two years," and five more years were coming "in which there is neither plowing nor harvest." Without help, this family would starve.

"God sent me before you to set for you a remnant on the earth." A remnant is a small part that survives when the rest is lost. This was more than one family's survival. Through Jacob's family God had promised to bless the whole world (12:3; 28:14). If they died in the famine, the promise would die with them. God sent Joseph ahead to keep the line of promise alive, the line that would one day lead to Jesus.

"To keep you alive by a great deliverance." Deliverance means rescue. God was saving His people.

45:8 *And now, **it was** not you **who** sent me here, but God; and He has appointed me as a father to Pharaoh, and as lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt.*

"It was not you who sent me here, but God." Joseph says it a third time (45:5, 7, 8). He wanted his brothers to understand that God's purpose was bigger than their sin.

God had made Joseph "a father to Pharaoh," a title for a chief adviser, "lord of all his house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt." The brothers had tried to make Joseph a slave. God made him a ruler.

Few places in the Bible show God's providence more clearly. Providence means God's care and control over all things, working out His plans through ordinary events and even through the wicked choices of people. Peter said something similar about the cross: Jesus was handed over by God's plan and foreknowledge, and yet those who crucified Him were guilty (Acts 2:23).

New Testament links: Acts 7:10 (alluded to)

45:9-11 *Hurry and go up to my father, and you will say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph: "God has appointed me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not delay. And you will dwell in the land of Goshen, and you will be near to me, you and your sons and the sons of your sons, and your flock and your herd and all that you have. And I will provide for you there, for **there are** still five years of famine, lest you become impoverished, you and your household and all that you have."'*

"Hurry and go up to my father." Joseph could not wait. Tell him, "God has appointed me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not delay."

Joseph promised a home "in the land of Goshen," near him. Goshen was a fertile region in the eastern part of the Nile Delta, good for grazing flocks. It was close to Joseph and to the road back to Canaan.

"I will provide for you." Five years of famine remained, and Joseph would feed his father, his brothers, their children, their grandchildren and all their animals. The brother they rejected would become the one who kept them alive.

New Testament links: Acts 7:14 (alluded to)

45:12-13 *And look, your eyes are seeing, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that **it is** my mouth that is speaking to you. And you will tell my father all my glory in Egypt and all that you have seen; and you will hurry, and you will bring my father down here."*

"And look, your eyes are seeing, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that is speaking to you." Joseph wanted them to know this was real. He spoke their language, he knew their family and Benjamin could see his face.

"Tell my father all my glory in Egypt." This was not bragging. Joseph wanted Jacob to know his son was safe, honored and able to take care of him. A father who had grieved for twenty-two years needed every detail.

45:14-15 *And he fell on the neck of Benjamin his brother, and he wept; and Benjamin wept on his neck. And he kissed all his brothers, and he wept over them; and after that his brothers spoke with him.*

"And he fell on the neck of Benjamin his brother, and he wept; and Benjamin wept on his neck." The two sons of Rachel held each other and cried.

"And he kissed all his brothers, and he wept over them." The ones who threw him in the pit, who sold him and who lied to their father: he kissed every one of them.

"And after that his brothers spoke with him." Remember 37:4: they hated Joseph and "were not able to speak to him in peace." Now, at last, they could talk. Forgiveness opened a door that had been closed for twenty-two years.

Is there a relationship in your life that has been silent for a long time? God can heal what seems broken for good. Remember, though, that Joseph spoke only after he had seen that his brothers had changed. Where it is safe, ask God whether it is time to open the door.

45:16-20 *And the report was heard **in** the house of Pharaoh, saying, "The brothers of Joseph have come." And it was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your animals and go, come into the land of Canaan, and take your father and your households, and come to me; and let me give you the good of the land of Egypt, and eat the fat of the land.' And you, you are commanded: 'Do this: take for yourselves from the land of Egypt carts for your little ones and for your wives, and you will carry your father, and you will come. And let your eye not pity your goods, for the good of all the land of Egypt, it **is** yours.'"*

News traveled fast in Pharaoh's house, and "it was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants." Joseph had saved Egypt, and Pharaoh was glad to honor his family.

Pharaoh went beyond what Joseph had offered. Bring your father and your households, "and let me give you the good of the land of Egypt, and eat the fat of the land." The "fat of the land" means its richest food.

He ordered them to "take for yourselves from the land of Egypt carts" for the little ones and the wives and for Jacob. Egyptian wagons, sent with Pharaoh's authority, would be a clear sign that the message came from Egypt. And "let your eye not pity your goods." Don't worry about what you leave behind. Everything you need is waiting here.

That is a picture of how God provides for His people. What we give up to follow Him is small next to what He has prepared.

New Testament links: Acts 7:13 (alluded to)

45:21-24 *And the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them carts at the command of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the way. To all of them he gave, to each man, changes of clothes; and to Benjamin he gave three hundred **pieces** of silver and five changes of clothes. And to his father he sent like this: ten donkeys carrying some of the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys carrying grain and bread and sustenance for his father for the way. And he sent his brothers away, and they went; and he said to them, "Do not be stirred up on the way."*

Joseph gave them the wagons, food for the journey and new clothes for each brother. To Benjamin he gave "three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of clothes." Joseph's brothers had once sold him "for twenty pieces of silver" (37:28). Now he gave his full brother three hundred pieces of silver, many times that amount. Garments, once the cause of their jealousy (37:3-4), are now gifts.

For his father he sent ten donkeys with "the good things of Egypt" and ten more with grain and bread for the trip.

Then Joseph gave them one more word: "Do not be stirred up on the way." The Hebrew word can mean to quarrel or to be troubled or afraid, but either way Joseph wanted them to travel in peace. He knew his brothers. On the way home they might start blaming each other for what they had done. Who would tell Jacob? Whose idea had it been? Joseph had forgiven them, and he did not want them tearing each other apart. Once forgiven, they needed to live at peace.

45:25-28 *And they went up from Egypt, and they came **to** the land of Canaan, to Jacob their father. And they told him, saying, "Joseph **is** still alive, and indeed he **is** ruling over all the land of Egypt." And his heart grew numb, for he did not believe them. And they spoke to him all the words of Joseph which he had spoken to them, and he saw the carts which Joseph had sent to carry him; and the spirit of Jacob their father revived. And Israel said, "Enough! Joseph my son **is** still alive. Let me go and see him before I die."*

The brothers came home and told him, "Joseph is still alive, and indeed he is ruling over all the land of Egypt." That meant they also had to confess what they had done. We aren't told about that conversation, but the truth likely came out.

As for Jacob, "his heart grew numb, for he did not believe them." The news was too good to be true. He had grieved too long.

Then "they spoke to him all the words of Joseph," and "he saw the carts which Joseph had sent to carry him." That was the proof. "The spirit of Jacob their father revived." The man who said he would go down to Sheol in sorrow came back to life.

In verse 28 Moses calls him "Israel" again (see 43:6). Faith rises again. "Joseph my son is still alive. Let me go and see him before I die."

For believers there is good news even greater than Jacob's. The One who was rejected, who suffered and who was handed over to death is alive. Jesus rose from the dead, and He reigns. When we hear that news and believe it, our spirits come alive too.

Chapter 45 Summary

Joseph could no longer hold back. He sent the Egyptians out and revealed himself to his brothers, weeping so loudly that Pharaoh's household heard. The brothers were terrified, but Joseph drew them close and told them not to be grieved or angry with themselves, because God had sent him ahead to preserve life. Three times he said that God, not they, had sent him to Egypt. He told them to bring Jacob and their families to live in Goshen, where he would provide for them through the remaining five years of famine. He embraced Benjamin, kissed all his brothers and finally talked with them. Pharaoh gladly offered the best of Egypt and sent wagons. Joseph sent gifts and told his brothers not to quarrel on the way. When Jacob heard the news and saw the wagons, his spirit revived, and he resolved to go and see Joseph before he died.

People and Places

- Goshen: a fertile grazing region in the eastern Nile Delta of Egypt, where Jacob's family would live.

Chapter 45 Study Questions

1. Joseph sent the Egyptians out before he revealed himself (45:1). What does that show about how he treated his brothers' shame, and how can we do the same for others?

2. How did the brothers react when Joseph said, "I am Joseph"? (45:3)

3. How many times does Joseph say that God sent him to Egypt? (45:5-8)

4. What did Joseph mean by "a remnant on the earth"? (45:7)

5. Where did Joseph want his family to live, and why? (45:10-11)

6. Pharaoh told them not to worry about the goods they left behind (45:17-20). How does that picture what God gives to those who follow Him?

7. What did Joseph tell his brothers as they left, and why? (45:24)

8. What finally convinced Jacob that Joseph was alive? (45:26-28)

9. Joseph said, "You sold me here," and also, "God sent me." How can seeing God's hand in your hurts help you forgive?

10. After Joseph forgave them, "his brothers spoke with him." Is there a broken relationship in your life where God might be calling you to take the first step? (If that relationship was abusive, talk with a pastor or counselor first. Taking the first step may mean forgiving from a safe distance.)

Chapter 46: Jacob Goes to Egypt

Scripture

46:1-7 And Israel set out, and all that he had, and he came to Beersheba, and he sacrificed sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. And God said to Israel in the visions of the night, and He said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "I ***am*** God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt, for into a great nation I will make you there. I, I will go down with you to Egypt, and I, I will also surely bring you up; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes." And Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father and their little ones and their wives in the carts which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. And they took their livestock and their possessions which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and they came to Egypt, Jacob and all his seed with him: his sons and the sons of his sons with him, his daughters and the daughters of his sons; and all his seed he brought with him to Egypt.

46:8-27 And these ***are*** the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt, Jacob and his sons: the firstborn of Jacob, Reuben. And the sons of Reuben: Hanoch and Pallu and Hezron and Carmi. And the sons of Simeon: Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar and Shaul, the son of the Canaanite woman. And the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. And the sons of Judah: Er and Onan and Shelah and Perez and Zerah; and Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. And the sons of Issachar: Tola and Puvah and Yob and Shimron. And the sons of Zebulun: Sered and Elon and Jahleel. These ***are*** the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, and Dinah his daughter; all the souls of his sons and his daughters ***were*** thirty-three. And the sons of Gad: Ziphion and Haggi, Shuni and Ezbon, Eri and Arodi and Areli. And the sons of Asher: Imnah and Ishvah and Ishvi and Beriah, and Serah their sister. And the sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel. These ***are*** the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter; and she bore these to Jacob, sixteen souls. The sons of Rachel, the wife of Jacob: Joseph and Benjamin. And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born ***those*** whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him: Manasseh and Ephraim. And the sons of Benjamin: Bela and Becher and Ashbel, Gera and Naaman, Ehi and Rosh, Muppim and Huppim and Ard. These ***are*** the sons of Rachel who were born to Jacob; all the souls ***were*** fourteen. And the sons of Dan: Hushim. And the sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel and Guni and Jezer and Shillem. These ***are*** the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel his daughter; and she bore these to Jacob; all the souls ***were*** seven. All the souls belonging to Jacob who came to Egypt, who came out of his thigh, besides the wives of the sons of Jacob, all the souls ***were*** sixty-six. And the sons of Joseph who were born to him in Egypt ***were*** two souls. All the souls of the house of Jacob who came to Egypt ***were*** seventy.

46:28-34 And Judah he sent before him to Joseph, to show ***the way*** before him to Goshen; and they came to the land of Goshen. And Joseph harnessed his chariot, and he went up to meet Israel his father to Goshen; and he appeared to him, and he fell on his neck, and he wept on his neck a long while. And Israel said to Joseph, "Let me die this time, after I have seen your face, that you ***are*** still alive." And Joseph said to his brothers and to the house of his father, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and I will say to him, 'My brothers and the house of my father, who ***were*** in the land of Canaan, have come to me. And the men ***are*** shepherds of a flock, for they have been men of

livestock; and their flock and their herd and all that they have, they have brought.' And it will be, when Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What ***are*** your occupations?' then you will say, 'Your servants have been men of livestock from our youth and until now, both we and our fathers,' so that you may dwell in the land of Goshen; for the abomination of Egypt ***is*** every shepherd of a flock."

Chapter 46 Preview

Jacob sets out for Egypt with everything he has. At Beersheba, on the southern edge of the Promised Land, he stops to worship. That night God speaks to him and tells him not to be afraid to go down to Egypt. God promises to make him a great nation there, to go down with him and to bring his family back up again.

Moses then lists the names of Jacob's family who went to Egypt, seventy in all. This list is the seed of the nation of Israel. The chapter ends with a tender reunion. Joseph rides out to Goshen, falls on his father's neck and weeps a long time. Jacob says he is ready to die now that he has seen his son's face. Then Joseph coaches his brothers on what to tell Pharaoh, so they can live together in Goshen.

Chapter 46 Study

46:1 *And Israel set out, and all that he had, and he came to Beersheba, and he sacrificed sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.*

Jacob "set out, and all that he had." He was moving his whole family, not paying a visit.

He stopped at Beersheba and "sacrificed sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac." Beersheba was in the far south of Canaan, the last major stop before the desert road to Egypt. Abraham had called on the LORD there (21:33). Isaac had built an altar there, and God had appeared to him there (26:23-25). Jacob had grown up there.

Before leaving the land God had promised, Jacob stopped to worship. Before a big move or a big decision, stop and seek God.

46:2-4 *And God said to Israel in the visions of the night, and He said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "I **am** God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt, for into a great nation I will make you there. I, I will go down with you to Egypt, and I, I will also surely bring you up; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes."*

God had not spoken to Jacob in Genesis since chapter 35, many years before. Now He called, "Jacob, Jacob." When God says a name twice in Scripture, it is a tender and urgent call, as with Abraham on Mount Moriah (22:11) and Moses at the bush (Exodus 3:4). Jacob answered, "Here I am."

"Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt." Why would Jacob be afraid? Egypt was where Abraham had gotten into trouble (12:10-20). God had told Isaac not to go there (26:2). And God had told Abraham that his descendants would be strangers in a land not their own and be oppressed for four hundred years (15:13). Leaving the Promised Land was a serious thing.

God gave Jacob four promises. The first: "into a great nation I will make you there." In Canaan they were a family. In Egypt they would grow into a nation. The second: "I will go down with you." God's presence is not tied to one place. The third: "I, I will also surely bring you up." Jacob would be buried in Canaan (50:13), and his descendants would return in the exodus. The fourth: "Joseph will put his hand on your eyes." Jacob would die peacefully with his beloved son beside him.

That second promise is the one we all need. Wherever God sends you, He goes with you. Jesus promised the same to His followers: "I am with you all the days" (Matthew 28:20).

46:5-7 *And Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father and their little ones and their wives in the carts which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. And they took their livestock and their possessions which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and they came to Egypt, Jacob and all his seed with him: his sons and the sons of his sons with him, his daughters and the daughters of his sons; and all his seed he brought with him to Egypt.*

"The sons of Israel carried Jacob their father and their little ones and their wives" in the wagons Pharaoh sent. They took their livestock and their property and went to Egypt, "Jacob and all his seed with him."

Moses is careful to say all of them went: sons, grandsons, daughters, granddaughters. No one was left behind. The whole covenant family moved together.

It took faith for Jacob to leave. He was an old man of 130, leaving the land God had promised to his grandfather, for a country with strange gods and a king he had never met. He went because God had spoken, and because his son was waiting for him. Following God often means stepping into a place we would never have chosen, trusting that He has gone ahead of us. Joseph had been sent ahead to prepare the way (45:5), and God Himself was going down with them. Many scholars believe this happened sometime in the first half of the second millennium B.C., though the exact date is debated.

New Testament links: Acts 7:15 (alluded to)

46:8-15 *And these **are** the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt, Jacob and his sons: the firstborn of Jacob, Reuben. And the sons of Reuben: Hanoch and Pallu and Hezron and Carmi. And the sons of Simeon: Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar and Shaul, the son of the Canaanite woman. And the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. And the sons of Judah: Er and Onan and Shelah and Perez and Zerah; and Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. And the sons of Issachar: Tola and Puvah and Yob and Shimron. And the sons of Zebulun: Sered and Elon and Jahleel. These **are** the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, and Dinah his daughter; all the souls of his sons and his daughters **were** thirty-three.*

These verses begin the list of "the names of the sons of Israel" who went to Egypt. Exodus 1:1 opens with almost the same words, tying the two books together.

The list is arranged by Jacob's four wives, starting with Leah's sons. Reuben, the firstborn, comes first. Simeon's son Shaul was "the son of the Canaanite woman," a reminder that some of Jacob's sons married local women.

Levi's sons were Gershon, Kohath and Merari. These three names would become the three families of priests' helpers in Israel. Moses and Aaron came from Kohath (Exodus 6:16-20).

Judah's sons include Er and Onan, who "died in the land of Canaan" (38:7-10), and Perez and Zerah, the twins born to Tamar. Perez's son Hezron is in the line that leads to King David (Ruth 4:18-22) and to Jesus (Matthew 1:3).

Leah's descendants, with Dinah, totaled thirty-three.

46:16-18 *And the sons of Gad: Ziphion and Haggi, Shuni and Ezbon, Eri and Arodi and Areli. And the sons of Asher: Imnah and Ishvah and Ishvi and Beriah, and Serah their sister. And the sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel. These **are** the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter; and she bore these to Jacob, sixteen souls.*

Next come the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maid. Zilpah's line totaled sixteen. Asher's daughter Serah is one of the few women named in the list.

These names may not mean much to us, but each one became a family, and many became clans within the tribes of Israel (Numbers 26). God knows His people by name.

46:19-22 *The sons of Rachel, the wife of Jacob: Joseph and Benjamin. And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born **those** whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him: Manasseh and Ephraim. And the sons of Benjamin: Bela and Becher and Ashbel, Gera and Naaman, Ehi and Rosh, Muppim and Huppim and Ard. These **are** the sons of Rachel who were born to Jacob; all the souls **were** fourteen.*

Rachel's sons are next. Moses calls her "Rachel, the wife of Jacob," the wife Jacob loved most. Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, born in Egypt, are counted here. Benjamin had ten sons. Benjamin is called "the boy" in chapters 43 and 44, but he was a grown man with a large family.

Rachel's line totaled fourteen.

46:23-25 *And the sons of Dan: Hushim. And the sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel and Guni and Jezer and Shillem. These **are** the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel his daughter; and she bore these to Jacob; all the souls **were** seven.*

Finally come the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid. Dan had one son, Hushim, and Naphtali had four. Bilhah's line totaled seven.

46:26-27 *All the souls belonging to Jacob who came to Egypt, who came out of his thigh, besides the wives of the sons of Jacob, all the souls **were** sixty-six. And the sons of Joseph who were born to him in Egypt **were** two souls. All the souls of the house of Jacob who came to Egypt **were** seventy.*

Moses gives two totals. "Sixty-six" were Jacob's direct descendants who traveled to Egypt. Then, counting Jacob himself, Joseph and Joseph's two sons who were already there, the whole house of Jacob numbered "seventy."

Stephen in Acts 7:14 says seventy-five. He was most likely quoting the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), which counts some additional grandsons of Joseph. Both counts are honest ways of numbering the family, using different lists. Scripture is not contradicting itself. The writers were counting the same family in different ways, the way we might count a family reunion with or without the in-laws.

The number seventy matters. In chapter 10, the Table of Nations lists about seventy nations. Seventy people went down into Egypt. About four hundred years later, the people who came out numbered about six hundred thousand men, not counting the children (Exodus 12:37). God kept His promise to make them a great nation.

New Testament links: Acts 7:14 (alluded to)

46:28 *And Judah he sent before him to Joseph, to show **the way** before him to Goshen; and they came to the land of Goshen.*

Jacob sent Judah "before him to Joseph, to show the way before him to Goshen." Judah, the brother who once led the way in selling Joseph, now led the way to Joseph. Jacob trusted him. Judah's growth as a leader continues.

46:29-30 *And Joseph harnessed his chariot, and he went up to meet Israel his father to Goshen; and he appeared to him, and he fell on his neck, and he wept on his neck a long while. And Israel said to Joseph, "Let me die this time, after I have seen your face, that you **are** still alive."*

Joseph "harnessed his chariot, and he went up to meet Israel his father." The ruler of Egypt did not wait for his father to come to the palace. He went out to meet him.

Joseph "fell on his neck, and he wept on his neck a long while." Twenty-two years of separation melted away. We can hardly imagine what that moment was like. Jesus told a story about a father who ran to his returning son and threw his arms around him (Luke 15:20). Here a son hurries out to meet his father.

Jacob said, "Let me die this time, after I have seen your face, that you are still alive." Jacob did not mean he wanted to die that day. He meant he had nothing left to wish for. His greatest sorrow had been turned to joy. God gave him seventeen more years with Joseph (47:28).

46:31-34 *And Joseph said to his brothers and to the house of his father, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and I will say to him, 'My brothers and the house of my father, who **were** in the land of Canaan, have come to me. And the men **are** shepherds of a flock, for they have been men of livestock; and their flock and their herd and all that they have, they have brought.' And it will be, when Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What **are** your occupations?' then you will say, 'Your servants have been men of livestock from our youth and until now, both we and our fathers,' so that you may dwell in the land of Goshen; for the abomination of Egypt **is** every shepherd of a flock."*

Joseph was wise and practical. He would go and tell Pharaoh that his family had arrived, and he told his brothers what to say when Pharaoh asked about their work. Tell him the truth: "Your servants have been men of livestock from our youth and until now."

Why? "For the abomination of Egypt is every shepherd of a flock." Genesis doesn't explain why. Egyptian art sometimes shows herdsmen as rough, low-class men, and Egyptians were wary of foreign herders from Canaan and the desert. Pharaoh himself owned flocks (47:6), so the dislike seems to have been aimed at shepherds as a class of people, especially foreign ones. Joseph turned that prejudice into a protection. If Pharaoh knew they were shepherds, he would settle them in Goshen, away from the Egyptian cities.

That separation was a gift from God. In Canaan, Jacob's family had been in danger of mixing with the Canaanites, as chapter 38 shows. In Goshen, kept apart by the Egyptians' own dislike of shepherds, they could grow into a nation while keeping their own identity and their faith in the God of Abraham. God can use even the prejudice of the world to protect His people.

Chapter 46 Summary

Jacob set out for Egypt and stopped at Beersheba to worship. God spoke to him in the night, telling him not to fear going down to Egypt. He promised to make him a great nation there, to go with him and to bring his family back up, and He said that Joseph would be with him at his death. Jacob's whole family went with him. Moses lists the sons and grandsons of Jacob by his four wives, totaling seventy in all with Joseph and his sons. Judah led the way to Goshen, and Joseph rode out, fell on his father's neck and wept a long time. Jacob said he could die in peace now that he had seen Joseph alive. Joseph then prepared his brothers to tell Pharaoh honestly that they were shepherds, so they would be settled in Goshen, apart from the Egyptians.

People and Places

- Septuagint: the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, quoted often in the New Testament.

Chapter 46 Study Questions

1. Where did Jacob stop on his way to Egypt, and what did he do there? (46:1)

2. What four promises did God make to Jacob? (46:3-4)

3. Why might Jacob have been afraid to go to Egypt? (46:3; 15:13; 26:2)

4. Moses lists every name of the seventy who came to Egypt (46:8-27). Why do you think he takes the time, and what does it show about how God sees His people?

5. Which of Judah's sons are in the line of David and of Jesus? (46:12; Matthew 1:3)

6. Whom did Jacob send ahead to Joseph, and why is that meaningful? (46:28)

7. Joseph went out to meet his father and wept on his neck a long time (46:29-30). What does this scene show about the joy God can bring after years of loss?

8. What did Joseph tell his brothers to say to Pharaoh, and why? (46:33-34)

9. God told Jacob, "I will go down with you." Where is God asking you to go right now, and how does this promise help?

10. Jacob stopped to worship before a big move. How can you seek God before the big decisions in your life?

Chapter 47: Israel Settles in Goshen

Scripture

47:1-12 And Joseph came and told Pharaoh, and he said, "My father and my brothers, and their flock and their herd and all that they have, have come from the land of Canaan; and look, they ***are*** in the land of Goshen." And from among his brothers he took five men, and he presented them before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What ***are*** your occupations?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants ***are*** shepherds of a flock, both we and our fathers." And they said to Pharaoh, "To sojourn in the land we have come, for there is no pasture for the flock that your servants have, for the famine ***is*** heavy in the land of Canaan. And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen." And Pharaoh said to Joseph, saying, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt, it ***is*** before you; in the best of the land settle your father and your brothers; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know, and there are among them men of ability, then you will appoint them chiefs of livestock over what ***is*** mine." And Joseph brought Jacob his father and made him stand before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many ***are*** the days of the years of your life?" And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my sojournings ***are*** a hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not reached the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojournings." And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and he went out from before Pharaoh. And Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and he gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph provided for his father and his brothers and all the house of his father ***with*** bread, according to the mouth of the little ones.

47:13-26 And ***there was*** no bread in all the land, for the famine ***was*** very heavy; and the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. And Joseph gathered up all the silver that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, for the grain which they were buying; and Joseph brought the silver into the house of Pharaoh. And the silver was finished from the land of Egypt and from the land of Canaan, and all Egypt came to Joseph, saying, "Give us bread; and why should we die before you? For the silver has come to an end." And Joseph said, "Give your livestock, and let me give ***bread*** to you for your livestock, if the silver has come to an end." And they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread for the horses and for the livestock of the flock and for the livestock of the herd and for the donkeys; and he sustained them with bread for all their livestock in that year. And that year was finished, and they came to him in the second year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that the silver is finished, and the livestock of the animals ***is*** my lord's; nothing is left before my lord except our bodies and our ground. Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our ground? Buy us and our ground for bread, and we and our ground will be slaves to Pharaoh; and give seed, and we will live and not die, and the ground will not be desolate." And Joseph bought all the ground of Egypt for Pharaoh, for Egypt sold each man his field, for the famine was severe upon them; and the land became Pharaoh's. And the people, he moved them to the cities, from the end of the border of Egypt even to its end. Only the ground of the priests he did not buy, for the priests ***had*** an allotment from Pharaoh, and they ate their allotment which Pharaoh gave them; therefore they

did not sell their ground. And Joseph said to the people, "Look, I have bought you today, and your ground, for Pharaoh. Look, ***here is*** seed for you, and you will sow the ground. And it will be at the harvests that you will give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four parts will be yours, for seed of the field and for your food and for those who ***are*** in your households, and to eat for your little ones." And they said, "You have kept us alive; may we find favor in the eyes of my lord, and we will be slaves to Pharaoh." And Joseph set it as a statute until this day over the ground of Egypt: to Pharaoh ***belongs*** the fifth; only the ground of the priests by themselves did not become Pharaoh's.

47:27-31 And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen; and they acquired possessions in it, and they were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly. And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; and the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were a hundred and forty-seven years. And the days of Israel drew near to die, and he called his son Joseph, and he said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your eyes, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal with me ***in*** steadfast love and faithfulness: please do not bury me in Egypt. And I will lie down with my fathers, and you will carry me from Egypt and bury me in their grave." And he said, "I, I will do according to your word." And he said, "Swear to me." And he swore to him. And Israel bowed down on the head of the bed.

Chapter 47 Preview

Joseph presents five of his brothers to Pharaoh, and they ask to live in Goshen as shepherds. Pharaoh gives them the best of the land. Then Joseph brings in his father, and something surprising happens: the old shepherd from Canaan blesses the king of Egypt. When Pharaoh asks Jacob's age, Jacob says his years have been few and hard.

The middle of the chapter shows how Joseph manages Egypt as the famine grows worse. The people trade their money, then their livestock, then their land for food, until all of Egypt belongs to Pharaoh, and Joseph sets a lasting law of one fifth for Pharaoh. Meanwhile Israel prospers in Goshen. The chapter closes with Jacob, now near death, making Joseph swear not to bury him in Egypt but with his fathers in Canaan.

Chapter 47 Study

47:1-4 *And Joseph came and told Pharaoh, and he said, "My father and my brothers, and their flock and their herd and all that they have, have come from the land of Canaan; and look, they **are** in the land of Goshen." And from among his brothers he took five men, and he presented them before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What **are** your occupations?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants **are** shepherds of a flock, both we and our fathers." And they said to Pharaoh, "To sojourn in the land we have come, for there is no pasture for the flock that your servants have, for the famine **is** heavy in the land of Canaan. And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen."*

Joseph told Pharaoh his family had arrived and were "in the land of Goshen." Then "from among his brothers he took five men" to meet the king. Moses doesn't name them.

Pharaoh asked, "What are your occupations?" They answered just as Joseph had told them: "Your servants are shepherds of a flock, both we and our fathers."

They added that they had come "to sojourn in the land," to live there as foreigners for a time. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had all been sojourners. Even in Egypt, this family knew it was not their final home. Their eyes were still on the land God promised (Hebrews 11:13-16).

They asked humbly: "Please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen." They didn't take for granted that Joseph's power would get them whatever they wanted.

47:5-6 *And Pharaoh said to Joseph, saying, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt, it **is** before you; in the best of the land settle your father and your brothers; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know, and there are among them men of ability, then you will appoint them chiefs of livestock over what **is** mine."*

Pharaoh answered generously. "The land of Egypt, it is before you." "In the best of the land settle your father and your brothers; let them dwell in the land of Goshen."

He even offered jobs. If any of the brothers were capable men, Joseph could "appoint them chiefs of livestock over what is mine." Pharaoh had his own flocks and herds, though Egyptians looked down on shepherds. Joseph's family was honored because of Joseph.

God blessed this family through the favor of a pagan king. He kept His promise to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you" (12:3). Pharaoh blessed Abraham's family, and Egypt was blessed through Joseph.

47:7-10 *And Joseph brought Jacob his father and made him stand before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many **are** the days of the years of your life?" And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my sojournings **are** a hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not reached the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojournings." And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and he went out from before Pharaoh.*

Joseph brought his father before Pharaoh, "and Jacob blessed Pharaoh." He blessed him when he came in and again when he left (47:10).

What a remarkable scene. Pharaoh was a great king, thought by his people to be a god. Jacob was an old shepherd from a foreign land who had come to ask for food. Yet Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Hebrews 7:7 says that the lesser is blessed by the better. In God's eyes, the man who carried His covenant promises was the greater one. Jacob was the heir of the promise to Abraham that "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (12:3), and here a Gentile king received that blessing.

Pharaoh asked, "How many are the days of the years of your life?" Jacob said, "The days of the years of my sojournings are a hundred and thirty years." Then he added, "Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life." Abraham had lived to 175 (25:7) and Isaac to 180 (35:28). By comparison, Jacob felt his life had been short and hard.

He was honest. Jacob's life had been marked by trouble, much of it his own doing. He had deceived his father and brother, fled for his life, been cheated by Laban, wrestled with God, lost Rachel and grieved Joseph for twenty-two years. He called his whole life his "sojournings," a pilgrimage. But God had been faithful through it all, and in Egypt Jacob would find peace at last.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:13 (alluded to)

47:11-12 *And Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and he gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph provided for his father and his brothers and all the house of his father* ***with*** *bread, according to the mouth of the little ones.*

Joseph settled his family "in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses." This is another name for Goshen, or part of it. The name Rameses is best known from the store city built by the kings named Ramesses in the 1200s B.C. (Exodus 1:11). Those who date the exodus to the 1400s B.C. usually see this as a later scribe updating an old place name so readers would know where it was, just as 14:14 uses the later name Dan for Laish. Those who date the exodus to the 1200s B.C. see it as the name used in Moses' own day.

Joseph "provided for his father and his brothers and all the house of his father with bread, according to the mouth of the little ones." He made sure every family got enough, down to the smallest child. The dream had come true, but Joseph used his position to serve his family, not to lord it over them.

47:13-15 *And* ***there was*** *no bread in all the land, for the famine* ***was*** *very heavy; and the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. And Joseph gathered up all the silver that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, for the grain which they were buying; and Joseph brought the silver into the house of Pharaoh. And the silver was finished from the land of Egypt and from the land of Canaan, and all Egypt came to Joseph, saying, "Give us bread; and why should we die before you? For the silver has come to an end."*

The famine grew worse. "There was no bread in all the land." Egypt and Canaan both "languished because of the famine," meaning they grew weak and faint.

The people bought grain until "the silver was finished from the land of Egypt and from the land of Canaan." Joseph "brought the silver into the house of Pharaoh." He was an honest manager and kept none of it for himself. When the money ran out, the Egyptians came crying, "Give us bread; and why should we die before you?"

47:16-17 *And Joseph said, "Give your livestock, and let me give* ***bread*** *to you for your livestock, if the silver has come to an end." And they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread for the horses and for the livestock of the flock and for the livestock of the herd and for the donkeys; and he sustained them with bread for all their livestock in that year.*

Joseph said, "Give your livestock." The people traded their horses, flocks, herds and donkeys for food. Horses appear here for the first time in Genesis. In a famine, people could not feed their

animals anyway, so trading them for grain made sense. Joseph kept the people alive for another year.

47:18-19 *And that year was finished, and they came to him in the second year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that the silver is finished, and the livestock of the animals **is** my lord's; nothing is left before my lord except our bodies and our ground. Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our ground? Buy us and our ground for bread, and we and our ground will be slaves to Pharaoh; and give seed, and we will live and not die, and the ground will not be desolate."*

The next year the people came back with nothing left but "our bodies and our ground." They made the offer themselves: "Buy us and our ground for bread, and we and our ground will be slaves to Pharaoh."

Slavery in the ancient world is a hard thing for us to read about. What they were offering seems to have been to become tenant farmers who worked land owned by the king and paid him a share of the harvest. It was probably closer to tenant farming than to the brutal slavery Israel would later suffer, though it still cost the people their freedom and their land. They asked for seed "and we will live and not die."

47:20-22 *And Joseph bought all the ground of Egypt for Pharaoh, for Egypt sold each man his field, for the famine was severe upon them; and the land became Pharaoh's. And the people, he moved them to the cities, from the end of the border of Egypt even to its end. Only the ground of the priests he did not buy, for the priests **had** an allotment from Pharaoh, and they ate their allotment which Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their ground.*

"And Joseph bought all the ground of Egypt for Pharaoh." Every Egyptian sold his field. "The land became Pharaoh's."

Joseph "moved them to the cities, from the end of the border of Egypt even to its end," perhaps to bring them near the grain stores (41:48). Some ancient copies read instead that he made the people servants. Only the priests kept their land, because Pharaoh gave them a regular allowance of food.

Some readers find Joseph's policy harsh. It made Pharaoh far more powerful, and it may have laid the groundwork for later oppression. Genesis tells what Joseph did without praising or blaming it. What is clear is that, in a terrible famine, the people of Egypt lived.

47:23-26 *And Joseph said to the people, "Look, I have bought you today, and your ground, for Pharaoh. Look, **here is** seed for you, and you will sow the ground. And it will be at the harvests that you will give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four parts will be yours, for seed of the field and for your food and for those who **are** in your households, and to eat for your little ones." And they said, "You have kept us alive; may we find favor in the eyes of my lord, and we will be slaves to Pharaoh." And Joseph set it as a statute until this day over the ground of Egypt: to Pharaoh **belongs** the fifth; only the ground of the priests by themselves did not become Pharaoh's.*

Joseph gave them seed and set the terms. At harvest the people would give "a fifth to Pharaoh," and keep four-fifths for seed, food and their households. This was the same twenty percent Joseph

had collected in the years of plenty (41:34). For ancient times, that was likely a moderate share. The old Babylonian laws of Hammurabi, for example, speak of fields rented out for a half or a third of the harvest.

The people's answer is important. "You have kept us alive." They did not see Joseph as a tyrant. They saw him as the man who had kept them alive.

Joseph "set it as a statute until this day over the ground of Egypt: to Pharaoh belongs the fifth." "Until this day" means it was still in force when Moses wrote.

47:27 *And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen; and they acquired possessions in it, and they were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly.*

Moses sets up a contrast. The Egyptians lost their land to Pharaoh. "And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen; and they acquired possessions in it, and they were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly."

"Fruitful" and "multiplied" are words that echo God's first blessing in creation, "Be fruitful and multiply" (1:28), and His promise to Jacob at Bethel (35:11). Exodus 1:7 will pick up the same words. Even in a foreign land, in a famine, God was keeping His promise and growing His people.

47:28 *And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; and the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were a hundred and forty-seven years.*

Jacob lived in Egypt "seventeen years." He had cared for Joseph for the first seventeen years of Joseph's life (37:2). Now Joseph cared for him for the last seventeen years of his. God gave back to Jacob what he thought he had lost.

Jacob's life lasted "a hundred and forty-seven years."

47:29-31 *And the days of Israel drew near to die, and he called his son Joseph, and he said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your eyes, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal with me* ***in*** *steadfast love and faithfulness: please do not bury me in Egypt. And I will lie down with my fathers, and you will carry me from Egypt and bury me in their grave." And he said, "I, I will do according to your word." And he said, "Swear to me." And he swore to him. And Israel bowed down on the head of the bed.*

"And the days of Israel drew near to die," and he called Joseph. He asked him to "put your hand under my thigh," the same solemn way of swearing an oath that Abraham asked of his servant (24:2). It was a promise made in the most serious way.

Jacob asked Joseph to "deal with me in steadfast love and faithfulness." Then his request: "Do not bury me in Egypt." He wanted to be buried with his fathers in Canaan.

Why did this matter so much? Because Canaan was the land God promised. Jacob was saying with his body what he believed in his heart. Egypt was a place to live for a while. Canaan was home,

because God had promised it to his descendants forever (48:4). His burial would be a statement of faith in God's promise.

Joseph said, "I, I will do according to your word." Jacob wanted more: "Swear to me." Joseph swore.

"And Israel bowed down on the head of the bed." Hebrews 11:21 recalls this moment and says he worshiped "on the top of his staff," following the Greek translation, which reads the Hebrew word as staff instead of bed. Either way, an old man near death bowed to worship God.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:21 (alluded to)

Chapter 47 Summary

Joseph presented five of his brothers to Pharaoh, and they asked to live in Goshen as shepherds and sojourners. Pharaoh gave them the best of the land and offered them charge of his own livestock. Jacob blessed Pharaoh and told him his 130 years had been few and hard. Joseph settled his family in the land of Rameses and provided food for them all. As the famine deepened, the Egyptians traded their money, their livestock and finally their land and themselves to Pharaoh for food. Joseph gave them seed and made a lasting law that a fifth of the harvest would go to Pharaoh, and the people thanked him for saving their lives. Meanwhile Israel prospered and multiplied in Goshen. After seventeen years in Egypt, Jacob, near death at 147, made Joseph swear to bury him in Canaan with his fathers, and he bowed in worship.

Chapter 47 Study Questions

1. What did Joseph's brothers tell Pharaoh about their work and their reason for coming? (47:3-4)

2. Pharaoh blessed Joseph's family, and God had promised to bless those who bless Abraham's family (47:6; 12:3). Where do you see that promise at work in this chapter?

3. Who blessed whom when Jacob met Pharaoh, and why is that surprising? (47:7, 10)

4. How did Jacob describe his life to Pharaoh? (47:9)

5. The Egyptians gave up their money, their livestock and finally their land for food (47:14-19). Do you think Joseph's policy was wise, harsh or both? Why?

6. What share of the harvest did Joseph require for Pharaoh, and how did the people respond? (47:24-25)

7. How did Israel fare in Goshen while Egypt suffered? (47:27)

8. What did Jacob make Joseph swear, and why did it matter so much to him? (47:29-31)

9. Jacob called his life a sojourning. How does seeing yourself as a pilgrim on earth change the way you live?

10. Jacob said his years had been "few and evil," yet God was faithful through them. How have you seen God's faithfulness in the hard years of your own life?

Chapter 48: Jacob Blesses Ephraim and Manasseh

Scripture

48:1-7 And it happened after these things, and one said to Joseph, "Look, your father ***is*** sick." And he took his two sons with him, Manasseh and Ephraim. And one told Jacob, and said, "Look, your son Joseph is coming to you." And Israel strengthened himself and sat on the bed. And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and He blessed me, and He said to me, 'Look, I am making you fruitful, and I will multiply you, and I will make you into an assembly of peoples, and I will give this land to your seed after you ***as*** an everlasting possession.' And now, your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you to Egypt, they ***are*** mine; Ephraim and Manasseh, like Reuben and Simeon, they will be mine. And your offspring whom you have fathered after them will be yours; by the name of their brothers they will be called in their inheritance. And I, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when ***there was*** still a stretch of land to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way of Ephrath, that ***is*** Bethlehem."

48:8-22 And Israel saw the sons of Joseph, and he said, "Who ***are*** these?" And Joseph said to his father, "They ***are*** my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Please bring them to me, and let me bless them." And the eyes of Israel were heavy from old age; he was not able to see. And he brought them near to him, and he kissed them, and he embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, "To see your face I did not expect; and look, God has shown me also your seed." And Joseph brought them out from beside his knees, and he bowed down on his face to the ground. And Joseph took the two of them, Ephraim at his right, toward the left of Israel, and Manasseh at his left, toward the right of Israel, and he brought ***them*** near to him. And Israel stretched out his right ***hand*** and put ***it*** on the head of Ephraim, and he ***was*** the younger, and his left ***hand*** on the head of Manasseh; he crossed his hands, for Manasseh ***was*** the firstborn. And he blessed Joseph, and he said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has shepherded me all my life until this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, may He bless the young men; and may my name be called on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and may they teem into a multitude in the midst of the earth." And Joseph saw that his father was putting his right hand on the head of Ephraim, and it was displeasing in his eyes; and he grasped the hand of his father to remove it from the head of Ephraim to the head of Manasseh. And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this ***is*** the firstborn; put your right ***hand*** on his head." And his father refused, and he said, "I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people, and he also will become great; and yet his younger brother will become greater than he, and his seed will become the fullness of the nations." And he blessed them on that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.'" And he put Ephraim before Manasseh. And Israel said to Joseph, "Look, I am dying; and God will be with you, and He will bring you back to the land of your fathers. And I, I give to you one ridge above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow."

Chapter 48 Preview

Jacob is sick and near the end of his life. Joseph comes with his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, and the old man gathers his strength and sits up in bed. Jacob remembers how God Almighty appeared to him at Luz and promised him the land. Then he adopts Joseph's two sons as his own, giving them equal standing with his oldest sons. In this way Joseph receives a double share in Israel, and two tribes will come from him.

When Joseph brings the boys forward for the blessing, he places the firstborn Manasseh at Jacob's right hand. But Jacob crosses his arms and puts his right hand on Ephraim, the younger. Joseph tries to correct him, but Jacob knows what he is doing. God has chosen the younger to be greater. Jacob blesses the boys in the name of the God who has shepherded him all his life and the angel who has redeemed him from all evil.

Chapter 48 Study

48:1-2 *And it happened after these things, and one said to Joseph, "Look, your father **is** sick." And he took his two sons with him, Manasseh and Ephraim. And one told Jacob, and said, "Look, your son Joseph is coming to you." And Israel strengthened himself and sat on the bed.*

"Your father is sick." Joseph took his two sons and went. Manasseh and Ephraim were probably about twenty or a little older by now, born before the famine (41:50) and at least seventeen years before this.

When Jacob heard Joseph had come, "Israel strengthened himself and sat on the bed." He knew this was important. He was about to pass on God's blessing, and he wanted to do it well.

The name changes between "Jacob" and "Israel" in these chapters are worth watching. Jacob is the man, weak and dying. Israel is the bearer of God's covenant, and in that role he still has something powerful to give.

48:3-4 *And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and He blessed me, and He said to me, 'Look, I am making you fruitful, and I will multiply you, and I will make you into an assembly of peoples, and I will give this land to your seed after you **as** an everlasting possession.'*

Jacob began with God, not with himself. "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and He blessed me." Luz was the old name for Bethel, where God met Jacob in the dream of the ladder (28:19) and again when he returned (35:6-12).

Jacob repeated what God had promised: "Look, I am making you fruitful, and I will multiply you," and He promised to "give this land to your seed after you as an everlasting possession."

"Everlasting possession" means just that. God gave the land as part of His unconditional covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and as we saw at 15:18-21 and 17:8, I believe that promise still stands and God still has a future for Israel (Romans 11:28-29).

48:5-6 *And now, your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you to Egypt, they **are** mine; Ephraim and Manasseh, like Reuben and Simeon, they will be mine. And your offspring whom you have fathered after them will be yours; by the name of their brothers they will be called in their inheritance.*

Now Jacob did something unusual. He adopted Joseph's two sons. "Ephraim and Manasseh, like Reuben and Simeon, they will be mine." They would no longer be counted as his grandsons but as his own sons, each the head of a tribe in Israel.

This gave Joseph a double portion. Reuben had lost the rights of the firstborn because he slept with his father's concubine (35:22; 49:4). The firstborn normally received a double share of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17). That double share now went to Joseph through his two sons (1 Chronicles 5:1-2 says this plainly).

Any other sons Joseph might have would be counted under Ephraim and Manasseh. That is why later lists of the twelve tribes sometimes include Ephraim and Manasseh and leave out Levi, who received no land, or list Joseph in place of his sons.

48:7 *And I, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when **there was** still a stretch of land to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way of Ephrath, that **is** Bethlehem."*

In the middle of all this, Jacob's mind went back to Rachel. "Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan," and he buried her "on the way of Ephrath, that is Bethlehem."

Why mention her here? Rachel was Joseph's mother, and she died young. By adopting her grandsons, Jacob was in a way giving Rachel more sons. She had two, and now through Joseph's sons she would be the mother of three tribes. Rachel was never far from Jacob's heart, even at the end.

Bethlehem is mentioned here again. It is a quiet name in Genesis, but it will become very important. David would be born there, and so would Jesus (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1).

48:8-11 *And Israel saw the sons of Joseph, and he said, "Who **are** these?" And Joseph said to his father, "They **are** my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Please bring them to me, and let me bless them." And the eyes of Israel were heavy from old age; he was not able to see. And he brought them near to him, and he kissed them, and he embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, "To see your face I did not expect; and look, God has shown me also your seed."*

"Who are these?" "And the eyes of Israel were heavy from old age; he was not able to see." Jacob had once deceived his own blind father, Isaac, to steal the blessing (27:1-29). Now he was the blind father giving the blessing.

"They are my sons, whom God has given me here." Joseph again gave God the credit (41:51-52).

Jacob kissed and embraced the boys. Then Israel said to Joseph, "To see your face I did not expect; and look, God has shown me also your seed." Jacob had thought Joseph was dead. God gave him

not only his son back but also his grandsons. God often gives more than we dare to ask (Ephesians 3:20).

48:12-14 *And Joseph brought them out from beside his knees, and he bowed down on his face to the ground. And Joseph took the two of them, Ephraim at his right, toward the left of Israel, and Manasseh at his left, toward the right of Israel, and he brought* ***them*** *near to him. And Israel stretched out his right* ***hand*** *and put* ***it*** *on the head of Ephraim, and he* ***was*** *the younger, and his left* ***hand*** *on the head of Manasseh; he crossed his hands, for Manasseh* ***was*** *the firstborn.*

Joseph took the boys "from beside his knees," bowed down, and then carefully placed them. He put Manasseh, the firstborn, toward Jacob's right hand, and Ephraim toward his left. The right hand was the place of greater honor and blessing.

"And Israel stretched out his right hand and put it on the head of Ephraim, and he was the younger." He crossed his hands on purpose.

The same pattern runs all through Genesis. God chose Abel over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Judah and Joseph over Reuben, and Perez over Zerah. Again and again God chooses the younger. Why? Because His blessings come by grace, not by birth order or human rights. God is free to choose, and He loves to lift up those the world passes over (1 Corinthians 1:27-29 makes the same point).

48:15-16 *And he blessed Joseph, and he said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has shepherded me all my life until this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, may He bless the young men; and may my name be called on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and may they teem into a multitude in the midst of the earth."*

Now Jacob blessed them. "He blessed Joseph," it says, because blessing Joseph's sons was blessing Joseph.

Jacob described God three ways. "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked." This is the God of the covenant. "The God who has shepherded me all my life until this day." Jacob was a shepherd, and he knew what shepherds do. God had led him, fed him and protected him, even through his worst years. This is the first time the Bible calls God a shepherd, long before David wrote Psalm 23.

Third: "The angel who has redeemed me from all evil." To redeem means to rescue or buy back. Jacob places this angel side by side with God as the one who blesses. Many believe this was the angel of the LORD (see chapter 16), the One who wrestled with Jacob at Peniel and whom Jacob said was God (32:24-30). Jacob prayed that this angel would bless them, "may he bless the young men," using a singular verb in Hebrew for God and the angel together, as if they were one.

Jacob asked that his name and the names of Abraham and Isaac would live on in them, and that they would "teem into a multitude." Both tribes did grow large. Ephraim became so leading a tribe that the northern kingdom of Israel was sometimes called by its name (Hosea 11:8).

48:17-19 *And Joseph saw that his father was putting his right hand on the head of Ephraim, and it was displeasing in his eyes; and he grasped the hand of his father to remove it from the head of Ephraim to the head of Manasseh. And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this **is** the firstborn; put your right **hand** on his head." And his father refused, and he said, "I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people, and he also will become great; and yet his younger brother will become greater than he, and his seed will become the fullness of the nations."*

Joseph saw the crossed hands, and "it was displeasing in his eyes." He tried to move his father's hand. "Not so, my father," Joseph said, "for this is the firstborn."

Jacob refused. "I know, my son, I know." That is a gentle answer. Jacob was blind in his eyes but not in his spirit. Manasseh "also will become great; and yet his younger brother will become greater."

This came true. In the first census in the wilderness, Ephraim outnumbered Manasseh (Numbers 1:32-35). By the second census the numbers had reversed (Numbers 26:34, 37), but over time Ephraim's leadership showed. Joshua came from Ephraim (Numbers 13:8), and in time Ephraim became the leading tribe of the north.

We can all learn from this. Joseph had his own ideas about how God's blessing should go. God had other plans. Our part is to trust God's choices, even when they surprise us.

48:20 *And he blessed them on that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.'" And he put Ephraim before Manasseh.*

"By you Israel will bless." For generations, Jewish fathers would bless their sons by saying, "May God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh." Many Jewish families still do this on the Sabbath.

Why these two? Perhaps because they were born in a foreign land and stayed faithful to the God of their fathers. Or because they were brothers, one placed above the other, who did not become rivals the way Cain and Abel or Jacob and Esau had.

"And he put Ephraim before Manasseh." Even in the wording of the blessing, Ephraim came first.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:21 (alluded to)

48:21-22 *And Israel said to Joseph, "Look, I am dying; and God will be with you, and He will bring you back to the land of your fathers. And I, I give to you one ridge above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow."*

"Look, I am dying; and God will be with you, and He will bring you back to the land of your fathers." Jacob was dying, but God was not, and Jacob's hope rested on God's promise to bring His people home.

Then Jacob gave Joseph "one ridge above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorites." The Hebrew word for "ridge" is shechem, which is also the name of the town of Shechem. Jacob had bought land there (33:19), and that is where Joseph's bones would one day be

buried (Joshua 24:32). Jacob says he took it "from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow." Genesis records no such battle, unless it refers to his sons' attack on Shechem (34:25-29), which Jacob condemned. We are not told more.

Chapter 48 Summary

When Jacob grew sick, Joseph brought his sons Manasseh and Ephraim to him. Jacob sat up and recalled God Almighty's promise at Luz to make him fruitful and give the land to his descendants as an everlasting possession. He adopted Joseph's two sons as his own, giving Joseph a double portion in Israel. He remembered Rachel, who died near Bethlehem. Though nearly blind, Jacob kissed the boys and thanked God for letting him see Joseph's children. When Joseph placed Manasseh at his right hand, Jacob crossed his hands and laid his right hand on Ephraim, the younger. He blessed them in the name of the God of Abraham and Isaac, the God who had shepherded him, and the angel who had redeemed him. When Joseph objected, Jacob said the younger would be greater. He promised that God would bring them back to the land of their fathers and gave Joseph an extra portion.

People and Places

- Luz: the older name of Bethel, where God appeared to Jacob.

Chapter 48 Study Questions

1. What did Jacob remember about God's appearance at Luz? (48:3-4)

2. What did Jacob do with Joseph's two sons, and what did it mean for Joseph? (48:5-6)

3. Why do you think Jacob mentioned Rachel at this moment? (48:7)

4. Jacob once deceived his own blind father to get a blessing (27:1-29). Now he is the blind father giving one (48:10-11). What do you make of that reversal?

5. How did Jacob place his hands, and why did it upset Joseph? (48:13-14, 17-18)

6. What three ways did Jacob describe God in his blessing? (48:15-16)

7. What did Jacob say about the future of Manasseh and Ephraim? (48:19)

8. Jacob was dying in Egypt, yet he spoke of God bringing his family back to the land of their fathers (48:21). What does that show about where his hope was?

9. Jacob called God "the God who has shepherded me all my life." Looking back on your own life, where can you see God shepherding you?

10. God often chose the younger son in Genesis. What does that tell you about how God's grace works, and how can it encourage you if you feel overlooked?

Chapter 49: Jacob Blesses His Sons

Scripture

49:1-12 And Jacob called to his sons, and he said, "Gather yourselves, and let me tell you what will happen to you at the end of the days. Assemble yourselves and listen, sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father. Reuben, you ***are*** my firstborn, my strength and the beginning of my vigor, preeminence of dignity and preeminence of power. Reckless as water, you will not have preeminence, for you went up ***onto*** the beds of your father; then you profaned ***it***: he went up ***onto*** my couch! Simeon and Levi ***are*** brothers; weapons of violence ***are*** their swords. Into their council let my soul not enter; with their assembly let my glory not be united; for in their anger they killed a man, and in their self-will they hamstrung an ox. Cursed ***be*** their anger, for ***it is*** fierce, and their wrath, for it is harsh. I will divide them in Jacob, and I will scatter them in Israel. Judah, you, your brothers will praise you; your hand ***will be*** on the neck of your enemies; the sons of your father will bow down to you. Judah ***is*** a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down like a lion, and like a lioness; who will rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, and the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him ***will be*** the obedience of peoples. Binding his donkey to the vine, and the son of his female donkey to the choice vine, he has washed his clothing in wine, and his robe in the blood of grapes. Dark of eyes from wine, and white of teeth from milk.

49:13-28 Zebulun will dwell at the shore of the seas, and he ***will be*** a shore for ships, and his flank ***will be*** toward Sidon. Issachar ***is*** a strong-boned donkey, lying down between the sheepfolds. And he saw a resting place, that it was good, and the land, that it was pleasant; and he bent his shoulder to bear, and he became a worker at forced labor. Dan will judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Let Dan be a serpent on the way, a horned viper on the path, that bites the heels of the horse, and its rider falls backward. For Your salvation I have waited, O LORD. Gad, a raiding band will raid him, and he will raid ***at their*** heel. From Asher, his bread ***will be*** rich, and he will give delicacies of a king. Naphtali ***is*** a doe let loose, the one who gives words of beauty. Joseph ***is*** a son of a fruitful ***one***, a son of a fruitful ***one*** by a spring; daughters step over a wall. And they embittered him, and they shot, and the masters of arrows bore a grudge against him. And his bow remained firm, and the arms of his hands were agile, from the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, from there ***is*** the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel, from the God of your father, and He will help you, and by the Almighty, and He will bless you ***with*** blessings of the heavens from above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors, up to the boundary of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of the one set apart ***from*** his brothers. Benjamin ***is*** a wolf; he tears; in the morning he will eat the prey, and at evening he will divide the spoil." All these ***are*** the twelve tribes of Israel, and this ***is*** what their father spoke to them; and he blessed them, each one according to his blessing he blessed them.

49:29-33 And he commanded them, and he said to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave that ***is*** in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that ***is*** in the field of Machpelah, which ***is*** facing Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as a possession of a burial site. There they buried Abraham

and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah: the purchase of the field and the cave that ***is*** in it ***was*** from the sons of Heth." And Jacob finished commanding his sons, and he gathered his feet into the bed, and he breathed his last, and he was gathered to his peoples.

Chapter 49 Preview

On his deathbed, Jacob calls his twelve sons together and speaks over each one. These are not all blessings in the way we usually think of them. Some are warnings and some are judgments. Reuben, Simeon and Levi hear that their past sins have consequences. Judah hears that kings will come from him, and that the scepter will not depart from his tribe until the One comes to whom the obedience of the peoples belongs. Joseph receives the richest blessing of all.

These words are a prophecy, a message from God about the future of each tribe. Much of it came true in the history of Israel, and the heart of it, the promise to Judah, points to Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. When Jacob finishes, he gives instructions for his burial in the cave at Machpelah with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah. Then he draws his feet into the bed and is gathered to his people.

Chapter 49 Study

49:1-2 *And Jacob called to his sons, and he said, "Gather yourselves, and let me tell you what will happen to you at the end of the days. Assemble yourselves and listen, sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father.*

Jacob summoned his sons to tell them "what will happen to you at the end of the days." This phrase can mean the future in general, and in the Old Testament it often points toward the last days and the coming of the Messiah. Jacob's words would come true in stages, first in the history of the tribes and finally in Christ.

I believe the full hope of these words will be completed when Jesus returns to reign. This passage gives no timetable, and I don't try to build one from it.

"Listen, sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father." Jacob speaks as both a father and the bearer of God's covenant. This is poetry, and it is prophecy.

49:3-4 *Reuben, you **are** my firstborn, my strength and the beginning of my vigor, preeminence of dignity and preeminence of power. Reckless as water, you will not have preeminence, for you went up **onto** the beds of your father; then you profaned **it**: he went up **onto** my couch!*

Reuben was the firstborn, "my strength and the beginning of my vigor." He should have had first place, "preeminence of dignity and preeminence of power."

Reuben was like water: "Reckless as water." Water that boils over or floods is wild and unstable. Reuben acted on impulse. "You will not have preeminence, for you went up onto the beds of your father." Years before, Reuben had slept with Bilhah, his father's concubine (35:22). Jacob said nothing then. Now, at the end, he spoke.

Reuben lost the rights of the firstborn. The double portion went to Joseph (48:5; 1 Chronicles 5:1-2), and leadership went to Judah. Scripture names no judge, prophet or king from Reuben.

One moment of unchecked desire cost Reuben his place. Sin we think is forgotten can shape our future. But God's grace was still there. Reuben remained one of the tribes, and his name is among the tribes in Revelation 7:5.

49:5-7 *Simeon and Levi **are** brothers; weapons of violence **are** their swords. Into their council let my soul not enter; with their assembly let my glory not be united; for in their anger they killed a man, and in their self-will they hamstrung an ox. Cursed **be** their anger, for **it is** fierce, and their wrath, for it is harsh. I will divide them in Jacob, and I will scatter them in Israel.*

Simeon and Levi are spoken of together. "Weapons of violence are their swords." Jacob was thinking of what they did at Shechem, when they killed all the men of the city to avenge their sister Dinah (34:25-30).

"Into their council let my soul not enter." Jacob wanted no part in their plans. "For in their anger they killed a man, and in their self-will they hamstrung an ox." To hamstring an ox was to cut its leg tendons so it could not walk. It was senseless cruelty.

"Cursed be their anger." Jacob did not curse his sons. He cursed their anger. God hates violence and cruelty, but He still loves the sinner.

"I will divide them in Jacob, and I will scatter them in Israel." Both tribes were scattered, but in very different ways. Simeon's land ended up inside Judah's territory (Joshua 19:1-9), and the tribe faded over time. Levi received no territory of its own, only cities spread throughout Israel (Joshua 21). But the Levites' scattering became a blessing. When Israel worshiped the golden calf, the Levites stood with the LORD (Exodus 32:26-29), and God made them the priestly tribe. Moses and Aaron were Levites. Their scattering put teachers of God's Law in every part of the land.

By God's grace, the same judgment could become a curse or a blessing, depending on how the next generation responded.

49:8-9 *Judah, you, your brothers will praise you; your hand **will be** on the neck of your enemies; the sons of your father will bow down to you. Judah **is** a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down like a lion, and like a lioness; who will rouse him?*

"Judah, you, your brothers will praise you." The name Judah sounds like the Hebrew word for "praise" (29:35). Judah would lead. His brothers would "bow down" to him, words that echo the blessing Isaac gave Jacob (27:29).

Judah was not the obvious choice. He had suggested selling Joseph (37:26-27), and he had sinned with Tamar (chapter 38). But he had changed. He offered his own life for Benjamin (44:33). God chose the repentant Judah to lead.

"Judah is a lion's cub." The lion is a picture of strength, courage and royalty. Judah has gone up from the prey and lies down like a lion, "who will rouse him?" No one would dare to disturb him. The lion became the symbol of the tribe of Judah.

New Testament links: Revelation 5:5 (alluded to)

49:10 *The scepter will not depart from Judah, and the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him* ***will be*** *the obedience of peoples.*

This is the verse the whole chapter has been building toward. "The scepter will not depart from Judah, and the ruler's staff from between his feet."

A scepter is a rod carried by a king as a sign of his authority. The ruler's staff is the same idea. Jacob was saying that kingship would belong to Judah's tribe. That came true with King David, who was from Judah, and with the line of kings who came after him.

"Until Shiloh comes, and to him will be the obedience of peoples." The word Shiloh is hard to translate. Many scholars read it as 'until He comes to whom it belongs,' that is, until the One who owns the scepter arrives. Others take Shiloh as a title meaning something like 'the peaceful one.' Either way, Jews and Christians have long understood this as a prophecy of the Messiah, the promised King.

This promise points to Jesus. He was born of the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14) and of the line of David (Matthew 1:1). In Revelation 5:5 He is called "the Lion who is of the tribe of Judah." He is the One to whom the scepter truly belongs. And "the obedience of peoples" means more than Israel. All nations will one day bow to Him. The promise to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham (12:3) runs right through Judah to Christ.

49:11-12 *Binding his donkey to the vine, and the son of his female donkey to the choice vine, he has washed his clothing in wine, and his robe in the blood of grapes. Dark of eyes from wine, and white of teeth from milk.*

These verses paint a picture of overflowing abundance. Grapevines will be so plentiful that a man can tie his donkey to "the vine" without worrying that it will eat it. Wine will be so common that he could wash his clothes in it, "his robe in the blood of grapes." He will be "dark of eyes from wine, and white of teeth from milk."

The picture fits the rich land Judah would receive, the hill country around Hebron and Bethlehem, which is still known for its vineyards. Many also see in it a picture of the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom, when the earth will be full of plenty. The prophets used the same kind of picture for that day (Amos 9:13).

Some also notice that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt (Matthew 21:1-7; Zechariah 9:9), and that the "blood of grapes" brings to mind the cup of the Lord's Supper. The New Testament doesn't link those to this verse, so I offer them only as pictures some see, not as teaching.

49:13 *Zebulun will dwell at the shore of the seas, and he **will be** a shore for ships, and his flank **will be** toward Sidon.*

Zebulun "will dwell at the shore of the seas, and he will be a shore for ships." His land would reach the coast, a place for ships to land. "His flank will be toward Sidon," a Phoenician port city on the coast to the north.

When the land was divided, Zebulun's territory lay in Galilee, between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean (Joshua 19:10-16). Joshua does not show it touching the sea itself, so many think it means Zebulun would be close to the coast and profit from trade along the sea routes. Jesus spent much of His ministry in the region of Zebulun, as Isaiah foretold (Matthew 4:13-16).

49:14-15 *Issachar **is** a strong-boned donkey, lying down between the sheepfolds. And he saw a resting place, that it was good, and the land, that it was pleasant; and he bent his shoulder to bear, and he became a worker at forced labor.*

"Issachar is a strong-boned donkey, lying down between the sheepfolds." A donkey is strong but content to rest. Issachar received good farmland in the Jezreel Valley. He saw "the land, that it was pleasant."

But because they loved their comfort, "he bent his shoulder to bear, and he became a worker at forced labor." They would rather serve others than fight for their freedom.

Issachar warns us. Comfort can make us lazy and willing to give up what God has given us, just to keep the peace. Still, the tribe had good moments too. In David's day, the men of Issachar had "understanding of the times" and knew "what Israel should do" (1 Chronicles 12:32).

49:16-17 *Dan will judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Let Dan be a serpent on the way, a horned viper on the path, that bites the heels of the horse, and its rider falls backward.*

Dan's name means "judge." "Dan will judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel." Even though Dan was the son of a maid, Bilhah, he would be a full tribe with his own leaders. Samson, one of the judges, came from Dan (Judges 13:2).

Dan would be "a serpent on the way, a horned viper on the path." A small snake can bring down a horse and rider by biting its heel. Dan would be small but dangerous, winning by cunning rather than strength.

The serpent picture has a darker side. The tribe of Dan set up its own idol shrine (Judges 18:30-31), and later one of King Jeroboam's golden calves was placed in the city of Dan (1 Kings 12:28-30). Dan is also missing from the list of tribes in Revelation 7:5-8. We aren't told why, and we should be careful not to say more than Scripture does.

49:18 *For Your salvation I have waited, O LORD.*

In the middle of the blessings, Jacob suddenly prays: "For Your salvation I have waited, O LORD."

Why here? Perhaps after picturing Dan's danger and failure, Jacob turned his eyes to God. Whatever his sons would do, Jacob's hope rested on the LORD's salvation.

The word "salvation" appears here for the first time in the Bible. Jacob was looking forward. He waited for God to save. Every believer since then has said the same prayer, and we still wait for the full salvation that Jesus will bring when He returns (Romans 8:23; Hebrews 9:28).

49:19-21 *Gad, a raiding band will raid him, and he will raid **at their** heel. From Asher, his bread **will be** rich, and he will give delicacies of a king. Naphtali **is** a doe let loose, the one who gives words of beauty.*

These three are short. Gad's name sounds like the Hebrew words for "raid." "Gad, a raiding band will raid him, and he will raid at their heel." Gad settled east of the Jordan, open to attack from desert tribes, but its men were known as fighters (1 Chronicles 12:8).

"From Asher, his bread will be rich, and he will give delicacies of a king." Asher's land along the northern coast was fertile, and it would produce food fit for a king. The name Asher means "happy" (30:13).

"Naphtali is a doe let loose, the one who gives words of beauty." A doe is a female deer, quick and free. Some think the "words of beauty" point to the song of Deborah and Barak (Judges 5:1), since Barak was from Naphtali (Judges 4:6).

49:22 *Joseph **is** a son of a fruitful **one**, a son of a fruitful **one** by a spring; daughters step over a wall.*

Now Jacob comes to Joseph, his beloved son, and the blessing overflows. "Joseph is a son of a fruitful one, a son of a fruitful one by a spring; daughters step over a wall."

The picture is of a fruitful tree or vine, and the "daughters" that "step over a wall" are its branches. A tree planted by a spring always has water, so it never dries up (Psalm 1:3 uses the same picture for the righteous man). Joseph's branches grew so much they reached over the wall. Joseph's life spread blessing beyond his own family, to Egypt and the whole region. Through Ephraim and Manasseh, his descendants would become two great tribes.

49:23-24 *And they embittered him, and they shot, and the masters of arrows bore a grudge against him. And his bow remained firm, and the arms of his hands were agile, from the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, from there **is** the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel,*

"The masters of arrows bore a grudge against him." Joseph had been hated by his brothers, sold, falsely accused and forgotten in prison. People shot at him with arrows of hatred and lies.

"And his bow remained firm." Joseph did not break. Why? Because "the arms of his hands were agile, from the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob." God held Joseph's arms steady.

Jacob gives God three great names here. He is "the Mighty One of Jacob." He is "the Shepherd," as Jacob called Him in 48:15. And He is "the Stone of Israel," a rock that never moves. Later Scripture

calls God the Rock of His people again and again (Deuteronomy 32:4), and the New Testament calls Jesus the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20).

When people attack you, your strength can come from the same Mighty One who held Joseph.

49:25-26 *from the God of your father, and He will help you, and by the Almighty, and He will bless you **with** blessings of the heavens from above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors, up to the boundary of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of the one set apart **from** his brothers.*

Jacob piles up blessings. They come "from the God of your father, and He will help you," and from "the Almighty, and He will bless you." There are "blessings of the heavens from above," rain and sun. There are "blessings of the deep that lies beneath," springs and wells. There are "blessings of the breasts and of the womb," many children and healthy flocks.

Jacob said, "The blessings of your father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors, up to the boundary of the everlasting hills." He prayed that all of it would rest on Joseph's head, "the one set apart from his brothers." The Hebrew word can also mean a prince. Joseph had been separated from his brothers for years. Now he was set apart for honor.

49:27 *Benjamin **is** a wolf; he tears; in the morning he will eat the prey, and at evening he will divide the spoil."*

"Benjamin is a wolf; he tears." Benjamin, the baby of the family, is pictured as a fierce hunter. "In the morning he will eat the prey, and at evening he will divide the spoil."

The tribe of Benjamin was known for its fighters. Ehud, a judge, was from Benjamin (Judges 3:15). So was Saul, Israel's first king (1 Samuel 9:1-2). Benjamin's fierceness also had a dark side, as seen in the terrible events of Judges 19-21. And the apostle Paul, who once hunted down Christians and later became the great missionary to the Gentiles, was from the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11:1).

49:28 *All these **are** the twelve tribes of Israel, and this **is** what their father spoke to them; and he blessed them, each one according to his blessing he blessed them.*

"All these are the twelve tribes of Israel." This is the first time the Bible calls them the twelve tribes. A tribe is a large family group descended from one ancestor. Jacob's sons were becoming a nation.

"He blessed them, each one according to his blessing." Some words were hard to hear, but each son got what God intended for him. Even the warnings were a kind of blessing, because they told the truth and kept the sons within God's family.

49:29-32 *And he commanded them, and he said to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave that **is** in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that **is** in the field of Machpelah, which **is** facing Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as a possession of a burial site. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah: the purchase of the field and the cave that **is** in it **was** from the sons of Heth."*

Jacob now gave his last instructions. "I am about to be gathered to my people." As we saw at 25:8, this phrase speaks of life beyond death. Jacob did not expect to vanish. He expected to be with his fathers.

He wanted to be buried in the cave that "is in the field of Machpelah," which Abraham had bought from Ephron the Hittite (23:16-20). Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah were buried there, "and there I buried Leah." Leah, the wife Jacob had loved less, would lie beside him forever. Rachel was buried near Bethlehem (35:19).

This cave was the first piece of the Promised Land Abraham's family ever owned, bought at full price (23:16). By being buried there, Jacob was declaring that God's promise of the land was true.

49:33 *And Jacob finished commanding his sons, and he gathered his feet into the bed, and he breathed his last, and he was gathered to his peoples.*

"And Jacob finished commanding his sons, and he gathered his feet into the bed, and he breathed his last, and he was gathered to his peoples."

It is a quiet, peaceful death. Jacob's life had been full of struggle. He had deceived and been deceived, wrestled with God and grieved deeply. But he ended well. He died blessing his children, worshiping God (Hebrews 11:21) and trusting God's promises.

None of us chooses the story of our life from the beginning. But by God's grace, we can finish well.

New Testament links: Acts 7:15 (alluded to)

Chapter 49 Summary

On his deathbed, Jacob gathered his twelve sons and spoke prophetic words over each one. Reuben lost his place as firstborn because he defiled his father's bed. Simeon and Levi were rebuked for their violence and told they would be scattered in Israel. Judah was promised leadership and royalty: the scepter would not depart from him until Shiloh came, a prophecy fulfilled in Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher and Naphtali received shorter words about their future. In the middle Jacob prayed, "For Your salvation I have waited, O LORD." Joseph received the richest blessing, as a fruitful son by a spring who stood firm against attack by the strength of the Mighty One of Jacob. Benjamin was pictured as a wolf that tears its prey. Then Jacob instructed his sons to bury him in the cave of Machpelah with his fathers, and he breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

People and Places

- Sidon: a Phoenician seaport north of Israel.
- Shiloh: a difficult word in 49:10, understood by many to mean 'He to whom it belongs,' a title for the Messiah.

Chapter 49 Study Questions

1. Some of Jacob's words were warnings, not blessings, yet Moses says he blessed each son "according to his blessing" (49:28). Why might even a hard word be a blessing?

2. Why did Reuben lose his place as the firstborn? (49:3-4; 35:22)

3. What were Simeon and Levi rebuked for, and how were they "scattered"? (49:5-7)

4. What did Jacob promise Judah? (49:8-10)

5. How does Revelation 5:5 connect Jesus to Judah's blessing? (49:9-10)

6. In the middle of the blessings Jacob stopped and prayed, "For Your salvation I have waited, O LORD" (49:18). Why do you think he prayed at that point, and what does it show about where his hope was?

7. What did Jacob say about Joseph, and where did Joseph's strength come from? (49:22-24)

8. Where did Jacob want to be buried, and who was already buried there? (49:29-31)

9. Reuben lost his place through one sin, but Judah was restored after his. What does that teach you about the consequences of sin and the grace of repentance?

10. Jacob ended his life blessing his children and worshiping God. What would it look like for you to finish well?

Chapter 50: The Deaths of Jacob and Joseph

Scripture

50:1-14 And Joseph fell on the face of his father, and he wept over him, and he kissed him. And Joseph commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father; and the physicians embalmed Israel. And forty days were completed for him, for thus the days of the embalming are completed; and Egypt wept for him seventy days. And the days of his weeping passed, and Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If, please, I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, 'My father made me swear, saying, "Look, I ***am*** about to die; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me." And now, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will return.'" And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, just as he made you swear." And Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the household of Joseph, and his brothers, and the household of his father; only their little ones and their flocks and their herds they left in the land of Goshen. And ***there*** went up with him both chariots and horsemen, and the camp was very great. And they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which ***is*** beyond the Jordan, and they lamented there ***with*** a great and very heavy lamentation; and he made for his father a mourning ***of*** seven days. And the inhabitant of the land, the Canaanite, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, and they said, "This a heavy mourning for Egypt." Therefore one called its name Abel-mizraim, which ***is*** beyond the Jordan. And his sons did for him thus, just as he had commanded them. And his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and they buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham had bought with the field for a possession of a burial site from Ephron the Hittite, in front of Mamre. And Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father.

50:15-21 And the brothers of Joseph saw that their father had died, and they said, "***What*** if Joseph bears a grudge against us, and he certainly repays us all the evil which we dealt out to him?" And they commanded ***a message*** to Joseph, saying, "Your father commanded before his death, saying, 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "We beg you, please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they dealt out evil to you."' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. And his brothers also went and fell before him, and they said, "Look, we ***are*** to you as slaves." And Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for ***am*** I in the place of God? And you, you planned evil against me; God planned it for good, so as to do as ***it is*** this day, to keep alive a numerous people. And now, do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them, and he spoke to their heart.

50:22-26 And Joseph remained in Egypt, he and the household of his father; and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. And Joseph saw sons of the third generation of Ephraim; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on the knees of Joseph. And Joseph said to his brothers, "I ***am*** about to die, and God will certainly visit you, and He will bring you up from this land to the land which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will certainly visit you, and you shall bring up my bones from here." And

Joseph died, a son of one hundred and ten years; and they embalmed him, and he was put in the coffin in Egypt.

Chapter 50 Preview

Jacob is dead, and the last chapter of Genesis begins with a son's tears. Joseph mourns his father, has him embalmed in the Egyptian way and leads a great procession back to Canaan to bury him in the cave of Machpelah, just as Jacob asked.

After the funeral, Joseph's brothers are afraid that he will finally take his revenge. Joseph weeps and gives a statement of faith that sums up his whole story: "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good." He promises to provide for them and their children. Before he dies at 110, Joseph makes his family swear to carry his bones out of Egypt when God brings them back to the Promised Land. The book closes looking forward, waiting for God to keep His word.

Chapter 50 Study

50:1 *And Joseph fell on the face of his father, and he wept over him, and he kissed him.*

"Joseph fell on the face of his father, and he wept over him, and he kissed him." God had promised Jacob that "Joseph will put his hand on your eyes" (46:4). God kept that promise exactly.

Joseph was a powerful man, but he was not too proud to grieve openly. Believers do grieve. Paul tells us we do not grieve as those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). But we do grieve. Tears at a graveside are not a lack of faith. They are love.

50:2-3 *And Joseph commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father; and the physicians embalmed Israel. And forty days were completed for him, for thus the days of the embalming are completed; and Egypt wept for him seventy days.*

Joseph commanded "his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father." To embalm is to dry and preserve a body. Egyptians used natron, a natural salt, along with oils and resins, to keep it from decaying. They were famous for this, and Jacob's body had a long journey to Canaan ahead of it.

Embalming took "forty days," and the Egyptians mourned for Jacob "seventy days." Ancient writers describe long periods like these. The Greek historian Herodotus says Egyptian embalming could take seventy days, and Diodorus says the Egyptians mourned a king for seventy-two days. Jacob was honored almost like royalty, because he was the father of the man who had saved Egypt.

Scripture records the embalming of only two people, Jacob and Joseph (50:26). It was not an Israelite custom. Genesis doesn't say more about Joseph's reasons, and nothing suggests he shared Egyptian beliefs about the afterlife.

50:4-6 *And the days of his weeping passed, and Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If, please, I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, 'My father made me swear, saying, "Look, I **am** about to die; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me." And now, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will return.'" And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, just as he made you swear."*

When the days of mourning were over, Joseph asked Pharaoh's household to speak to the king for him. He may have gone through them because he was in mourning and it was not proper to come into Pharaoh's presence that way.

Joseph explained his father's oath: "in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan." He promised, "I will return." Pharaoh agreed. "Go up and bury your father, just as he made you swear."

Joseph kept his promise to his father and his promise to Pharaoh. A man of integrity keeps his word to everyone.

50:7-9 *And Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the household of Joseph, and his brothers, and the household of his father; only their little ones and their flocks and their herds they left in the land of Goshen. And **there** went up with him both chariots and horsemen, and the camp was very great.*

The funeral procession was huge. "All the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt" went, along with Joseph's whole family. Only the little ones and the flocks stayed in Goshen. "Both chariots and horsemen" went along too. "The camp was very great."

Think of it: the leaders of Egypt traveling to Canaan to bury a Hebrew shepherd. The family that came to Egypt hungry was now honored by the whole nation. Many years later, Israel would leave Egypt again with all their flocks and herds, never to return (Exodus 12:31-38). This journey was a small preview of that day.

50:10-11 *And they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which **is** beyond the Jordan, and they lamented there **with** a great and very heavy lamentation; and he made for his father a mourning **of** seven days. And the inhabitant of the land, the Canaanite, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, and they said, "This **is** a heavy mourning for Egypt." Therefore one called its name Abel-mizraim, which **is** beyond the Jordan.*

They came to "the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan." A threshing floor was a flat, open place where grain was separated from the husks. "Beyond the Jordan" is hard to place. We aren't told whether the procession took a longer route around the Dead Sea or whether the phrase is used from a different point of view.

They mourned there for "seven days." The Canaanites watched and said, "This is a heavy mourning for Egypt." So they named the place "Abel-mizraim," which means mourning of Egypt, or meadow of Egypt.

50:12-14 *And his sons did for him thus, just as he had commanded them. And his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and they buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham had bought with the field for a possession of a burial site from Ephron the Hittite, in front of Mamre. And Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father.*

"His sons did for him thus, just as he had commanded them." They buried Jacob "in the cave of the field of Machpelah," near Mamre, which Abraham had bought (23:17-20). Jacob was laid to rest with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah.

Joseph and his brothers then returned to Egypt, as Joseph had promised Pharaoh. The family would stay in Egypt for many more years, but the bones in Machpelah were a testimony. This land belonged to them by God's promise, and one day they would come back.

New Testament links: Acts 7:16 (alluded to)

50:15 *And the brothers of Joseph saw that their father had died, and they said, "**What** if Joseph bears a grudge against us, and he certainly repays us all the evil which we dealt out to him?"*

Now that Jacob was dead, the brothers began to worry. "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us, and he certainly repays us all the evil which we dealt out to him?"

Seventeen years had passed since Joseph forgave them and kissed them (45:15). He had fed them and their children all that time. Yet they still feared he had only been waiting for their father to die.

Guilt is hard to let go of. Many believers live like this. God has forgiven them completely in Christ, but they keep waiting for Him to punish them. They don't quite believe the forgiveness is real. If you are in Christ, there is "no condemnation" for you (Romans 8:1).

50:16-17 *And they commanded **a message** to Joseph, saying, "Your father commanded before his death, saying, 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "We beg you, please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they dealt out evil to you."' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.*

The brothers sent a message: "Your father commanded before his death." They said Jacob had told them to ask Joseph to forgive "the transgression of your brothers and their sin."

Scripture never records Jacob giving this instruction. Maybe he did. Maybe the brothers made it up out of fear. We don't know. Either way, they finally asked for forgiveness plainly, calling it "transgression" and "sin," and calling themselves "the servants of the God of your father."

"Joseph wept when they spoke to him." Why? Perhaps because it hurt that they still didn't trust his love after all these years. Perhaps because he was moved to hear them finally say the words. Love that is doubted still hurts.

50:18-19 *And his brothers also went and fell before him, and they said, "Look, we **are** to you as slaves." And Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for **am** I in the place of God?*

Then the brothers came in person and "fell before him." "Look, we are to you as slaves." One last time Joseph's dreams came true (37:7-10). The brothers who once mocked the idea that he would rule over them now offered themselves as his slaves.

Joseph's answer was beautiful. "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?" Joseph refused to play God. Judgment and revenge belong to God, not to us. Paul says the same: "not avenging yourselves," but "give place to the wrath" (Romans 12:19). Joseph trusted God to be the Judge, which freed him to be a brother.

50:20 *And you, you planned evil against me; God planned it for good, so as to do as **it is** this day, to keep alive a numerous people.*

Here we reach the key verse of Joseph's whole story, and one of the great verses of the Bible. "And you, you planned evil against me; God planned it for good, so as to do as it is this day, to keep alive a numerous people."

Joseph does not pretend his brothers were innocent. "You planned evil against me." They did. Their hearts were full of jealousy and hatred, and they are responsible for that.

"God planned it for good." The same events, the same years, the same pit and prison, had two purposes. The brothers' purpose was evil. God's purpose was good. God did not cause their sin, but He ruled over it and turned it to save lives, including the lives of the very men who sinned.

We call this God's providence, His wise and loving control over everything that happens. Paul writes that "to those who love God all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28). That does not mean all things are good. It means God is able to bring good out of all things for His people.

The greatest example is the cross. Wicked men crucified Jesus, and they were guilty. Yet it was God's plan to save sinners through that very act (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). Many see in Joseph a picture of this: rejected by his brothers, he became the one who saved them. If God can bring salvation out of the cross, He can bring good out of whatever you are facing.

50:21 *And now, do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them, and he spoke to their heart.*

"And now, do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Joseph didn't just say he forgave them. He promised to keep caring for them and their children.

"And he comforted them, and he spoke to their heart." Joseph did not leave them in fear. He reassured them over and over.

Real forgiveness is more than words. Where it is safe and the other person has truly changed, it shows itself in kindness over time, as Joseph's did.

50:22-23 *And Joseph remained in Egypt, he and the household of his father; and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. And Joseph saw sons of the third generation of Ephraim; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on the knees of Joseph.*

Joseph "lived one hundred and ten years." Ancient Egyptian writings sometimes speak of 110 years as an ideal lifespan. One Egyptian tale, for example, describes the wise man Djedi as 110 years old. Joseph lived a full life by any measure.

He saw "sons of the third generation of Ephraim." He also saw that the sons of Machir, Manasseh's son, "were born on the knees of Joseph." That phrase probably means Joseph welcomed them as his own family, possibly a kind of adoption, as Jacob had done with Joseph's sons (48:12). Joseph had lost his own childhood home. God gave him a house full of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

50:24 *And Joseph said to his brothers, "I **am** about to die, and God will certainly visit you, and He will bring you up from this land to the land which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."*

Near the end, Joseph said, "I am about to die, and God will certainly visit you, and He will bring you up from this land to the land which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

Joseph had lived in Egypt for over ninety years. He had an Egyptian name, an Egyptian wife and the highest office in Egypt. Yet his heart was never in Egypt. His hope rested on the promise God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

"God will certainly visit you." The Hebrew means God will visit you, come to you and act on your behalf. Joseph knew hard times were coming. He also knew that God would come.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:22 (alluded to)

50:25 *And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will certainly visit you, and you shall bring up my bones from here."*

Joseph "made the sons of Israel swear" to carry his bones up from Egypt. He did not ask to be buried in Canaan right away, as Jacob had. He asked to go with his people when God brought them out.

Hebrews 11:22 points to this moment as an act of faith. By faith Joseph spoke of the exodus and gave orders about his bones. Joseph never saw the exodus, but he believed it would happen.

Centuries later, Moses took Joseph's bones with him when Israel left Egypt (Exodus 13:19). Israel carried them through the wilderness for forty years, and they were finally buried at Shechem in the land Jacob had bought (Joshua 24:32). They were a standing reminder that God keeps His promises.

New Testament links: Hebrews 11:22 (alluded to)

50:26 *And Joseph died, a son of one hundred and ten years; and they embalmed him, and he was put in the coffin in Egypt.*

"And Joseph died, a son of one hundred and ten years; and they embalmed him, and he was put in the coffin in Egypt."

Genesis started with "In the beginning God created," and it ends "in the coffin in Egypt." Sin brought death into the world in chapter 3, and death has followed every generation since.

But this coffin is not the end of the story. It is a promise waiting to be kept. God's people were in Egypt, but they would not stay there. God would visit them. He would bring them out. And one day, God would send the true Deliverer, born of the tribe of Judah, who would not stay in His tomb. Jesus rose from the dead and broke the power of death forever.

Genesis ends looking forward in faith. So does the Christian life. We wait, as Joseph did, for God to finish what He started, and we know He will.

Chapter 50 Summary

Joseph wept over his father and had him embalmed, and Egypt mourned Jacob for seventy days. With Pharaoh's permission, Joseph led a great procession of Egyptian officials and his own family to Canaan, where they mourned at the threshing floor of Atad and buried Jacob in the cave of Machpelah, as he had asked. After returning to Egypt, Joseph's brothers feared he would take revenge now that their father was dead. They asked for forgiveness and offered themselves as his servants. Joseph wept, refused to take God's place and said, "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good," to save many lives. He promised to provide for them and their children. Joseph lived to 110 and saw his great-grandchildren. Before he died, he told his brothers that God would surely bring them back to the land He promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and made them swear to carry his bones there. Joseph died and was placed in a coffin in Egypt, waiting for God to keep His word.

People and Places

- Atad: a threshing floor "beyond the Jordan" where Jacob was mourned; also called Abel-mizraim.
- Machir: a son of Manasseh, ancestor of a major clan of that tribe.

I judge a lot. I look at people and form opinions I have no real basis for. Joseph's question, "Am I in the place of God?", stops me in my tracks. I am not, and I have to keep reminding myself of that. Leaving people in God's hands frees me from a job that was never mine.

Chapter 50 Study Questions

1. How long did the Egyptians mourn for Jacob? (50:3)

2. Egypt's leaders traveled to Canaan to bury a Hebrew shepherd (50:7-9). What does this show about how God had honored Jacob's family?

3. Why did it matter so much to Jacob to be buried in Canaan and not in Egypt? (50:13; 47:29-31)

4. Why were Joseph's brothers afraid after their father died? (50:15)

5. How did Joseph respond when they asked for forgiveness? (50:17-19)

6. What did Joseph say God had done with the evil his brothers meant? (50:20)

7. How did Joseph show that his forgiveness was real (50:21)? How is forgiving someone different from trusting them again?

8. What did Joseph make his family swear before he died, and why? (50:24-25; Hebrews 11:22)

9. Joseph said, "Am I in the place of God?" Is there someone you need to stop judging and leave in God's hands?

10. Joseph saw God turn evil into good. What hard thing in your life do you need to trust God to use for good?

Conclusion

Genesis begins with God creating life in a perfect garden, and it ends with a coffin in Egypt (50:26). In between, we see the whole story of the human race in miniature: a good world ruined by sin, people running from God, and God refusing to give up on them. He clothed Adam and Eve, spared Noah, called Abraham, wrestled with Jacob, and lifted Joseph from a pit to a palace.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. Read that way, Genesis gives us a true account of where we came from, why the world is broken, and how God set His plan of rescue in motion from the very first day sin entered the world.

Genesis also shows us a God who keeps His promises. He promised Abraham a son, and Isaac was born when it seemed impossible. He promised Abraham's descendants a land, and that promise still stands. He promised that through Abraham's Seed all the families of the earth would be blessed (12:3; 22:18), and Paul tells us that Seed is Christ (Galatians 3:16). Joseph summed up the whole book when he told his brothers, "you planned evil against me; God planned it for good" (50:20). God was working through every failure, every family fight, and every long wait to bring about His plan.

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and give you confidence that the God of Genesis is the same God today. He still keeps His word. He still works all things together for good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

The very first promise of the gospel is found in Genesis 3:15, where God said the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. That promise came true at the cross, when Jesus died for our sins and rose again. Abraham "believed in the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness" (15:6), and Paul says it is the same for us (Romans 4:3-5, 23-24). The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow in God's Word and walk with Him, as Abraham did, by faith.

Old and New Testament Links in Genesis

This table lists every Old and New Testament link printed in this study, in verse order. I took the links from the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, with help from the OpenBible.info cross-references, and I checked each one by reading both passages in the Steadfast Literal Bible. Where I was not sure of a link, I left it out.

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
1:1	Hebrews 11:3	alluded to
1:1	John 1:1	alluded to
1:1	2 Peter 3:5	alluded to
1:3-5	2 Corinthians 4:6	alluded to
1:9-13	2 Peter 3:5	alluded to
1:26	James 3:9	alluded to
1:26	Colossians 3:10	alluded to
1:27	Matthew 19:4	quoted
1:27	Mark 10:6	quoted
1:27	1 Corinthians 11:7	alluded to
1:27	Colossians 3:10	alluded to
1:29-31	1 Timothy 4:4	alluded to
2:1-3	Hebrews 4:4	quoted
2:1-3	Hebrews 4:10	alluded to
2:7	1 Corinthians 15:45	quoted
2:7	1 Corinthians 15:47	alluded to
2:7	1 Timothy 2:13	alluded to
2:7	John 20:22	alluded to
2:8-9	Revelation 2:7	alluded to
2:8-9	Revelation 22:2	alluded to
2:8-9	Revelation 22:14	alluded to
2:16-17	1 Corinthians 15:22	alluded to
2:18	1 Corinthians 11:9	alluded to
2:21-22	1 Corinthians 11:8	alluded to
2:23	Ephesians 5:30	alluded to
2:24	Ephesians 5:31	quoted
2:24	1 Corinthians 6:16	quoted
2:24	Mark 10:7-8	quoted
2:24	Matthew 19:5	quoted
2:24	Matthew 19:6	alluded to
3:1	2 Corinthians 11:3	alluded to
3:1	Revelation 12:9	alluded to
3:1	Revelation 20:2	alluded to
3:6	1 Timothy 2:14	alluded to
3:6	Romans 5:12	alluded to
3:9-13	2 Corinthians 11:3	alluded to
3:9-13	Revelation 12:9	alluded to
3:9-13	1 Timothy 2:14	alluded to
3:15	Revelation 12:17	alluded to
3:15	Romans 16:20	alluded to

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
3:16	1 Timothy 2:15	alluded to
3:17-19	Romans 8:20	alluded to
3:17-19	Hebrews 6:8	alluded to
3:22-24	Revelation 2:7	alluded to
3:22-24	Revelation 22:14	alluded to
4:3-5	Hebrews 11:4	alluded to
4:8	Matthew 23:35	alluded to
4:8	Jude 1:11	alluded to
4:8	1 John 3:12	alluded to
4:8	Luke 11:51	alluded to
4:9-12	Hebrews 12:24	alluded to
4:9-12	Luke 11:51	alluded to
4:23-24	Matthew 18:22	alluded to
5:1-2	James 3:9	alluded to
5:3-5	Romans 5:14	pictured
5:3-5	Luke 3:36-38	alluded to
5:6-20	Luke 3:36-38	alluded to
5:21-24	Hebrews 11:5	alluded to
5:21-24	Luke 3:36-38	alluded to
5:25-27	Luke 3:36-38	alluded to
5:28-31	Luke 3:36-38	alluded to
5:32	Luke 3:36-38	alluded to
6:11-13	Hebrews 11:7	alluded to
7:1	Hebrews 11:7	alluded to
7:5-9	Luke 17:26-27	alluded to
7:5-9	Matthew 24:37-38	alluded to
7:10-12	2 Peter 3:6	alluded to
7:13-16	1 Peter 3:20	alluded to
7:13-16	2 Peter 2:5	alluded to
7:19-20	2 Peter 3:6	alluded to
7:21-23	2 Peter 2:5	alluded to
7:21-23	1 Peter 3:20	alluded to
7:21-23	Luke 17:26-27	alluded to
11:10-17	Luke 3:34-36	alluded to
11:18-26	Luke 3:34-36	alluded to
11:31-32	Acts 7:4	alluded to
12:1	Acts 7:3	quoted
12:1	Hebrews 11:8	alluded to
12:3	Galatians 3:8	quoted
12:3	Acts 3:25	quoted
12:4-5	Hebrews 11:8	alluded to
12:7	Acts 7:5	alluded to
13:12-13	2 Peter 2:8	alluded to
13:14-15	Galatians 3:16	quoted
14:18	Hebrews 7:1-2	pictured
14:19-20	Hebrews 7:1-2	pictured
14:19-20	Hebrews 7:7	alluded to
15:4-5	Romans 4:18	quoted

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
15:6	Galatians 3:6	quoted
15:6	James 2:23	quoted
15:6	Romans 4:3	quoted
15:6	Romans 4:22-24	quoted
15:7-8	Acts 7:2	alluded to
15:12-14	Acts 7:6	quoted
15:12-14	Acts 7:7	quoted
16:15-16	Galatians 4:22-23	alluded to
16:15-16	Galatians 4:24	alluded to
17:4-5	Romans 4:17	quoted
17:8	Galatians 3:16	quoted
17:8	Acts 7:5	alluded to
17:9-11	John 7:22	alluded to
17:9-11	Romans 4:11	alluded to
17:9-11	Acts 7:8	alluded to
17:12-13	Luke 1:59	alluded to
17:17	Romans 4:19	alluded to
18:1-2	Hebrews 13:2	alluded to
18:9-10	Romans 9:9	quoted
18:9-10	Galatians 4:23	alluded to
18:11-12	Luke 1:7	alluded to
18:11-12	Hebrews 11:11	alluded to
18:11-12	1 Peter 3:6	alluded to
18:11-12	Romans 4:19	alluded to
18:13-14	Romans 9:9	quoted
18:13-14	Luke 1:37	alluded to
18:16-19	Galatians 3:8	quoted
18:23-25	Hebrews 12:23	alluded to
19:1-3	Hebrews 13:2	alluded to
19:4-5	Jude 1:7	alluded to
19:17-22	Luke 17:31	alluded to
19:23-25	2 Peter 2:6	alluded to
19:23-25	Jude 1:7	alluded to
19:23-25	Revelation 14:10	alluded to
19:23-25	Matthew 11:23	alluded to
19:23-25	Luke 17:29	alluded to
19:26	Luke 17:32	alluded to
19:27-29	Revelation 9:2	alluded to
19:27-29	2 Peter 2:7	alluded to
19:27-29	2 Peter 2:6	alluded to
21:1-2	Galatians 4:22	alluded to
21:1-2	Hebrews 11:11	alluded to
21:3-5	Acts 7:8	alluded to
21:8-10	Galatians 4:30	quoted
21:8-10	Galatians 4:29	alluded to
21:11-13	Romans 9:7	quoted
21:11-13	Hebrews 11:18	quoted
22:1	Hebrews 11:17	alluded to

Verse in this study	New Testament passage	Kind
22:2	Hebrews 11:17	alluded to
22:9-10	James 2:21	alluded to
22:11-12	Hebrews 11:19	alluded to
22:13-14	Hebrews 11:19	alluded to
22:15-18	Acts 3:25	quoted
22:15-18	Hebrews 6:14	quoted
22:15-18	Hebrews 11:12	alluded to
22:15-18	Hebrews 6:13	alluded to
23:3-6	Hebrews 11:13	alluded to
25:19-21	Romans 9:10	alluded to
25:22-23	Romans 9:12	quoted
25:29-34	Hebrews 12:16	alluded to
26:1-5	Luke 1:73	alluded to
27:30-33	Hebrews 11:20	alluded to
27:34-38	Hebrews 12:17	alluded to
27:39-40	Hebrews 11:20	alluded to
28:3-5	Galatians 3:14	alluded to
28:12	John 1:51	alluded to
33:18-20	John 4:5	alluded to
33:18-20	Acts 7:16	alluded to
35:27-29	Hebrews 11:9	alluded to
37:1-2	Hebrews 11:9	alluded to
37:25-28	Acts 7:9	alluded to
38:8-10	Matthew 22:24	alluded to
38:8-10	Mark 12:19	alluded to
38:8-10	Luke 20:28	alluded to
39:2-3	Acts 7:9	alluded to
41:41-44	Acts 7:10	alluded to
41:53-54	Acts 7:11	alluded to
42:1-2	Acts 7:12	alluded to
42:3-5	Acts 7:11	alluded to
45:1-2	Acts 7:13	alluded to
45:8	Acts 7:10	alluded to
45:9-11	Acts 7:14	alluded to
45:16-20	Acts 7:13	alluded to
46:5-7	Acts 7:15	alluded to
46:26-27	Acts 7:14	alluded to
47:7-10	Hebrews 11:13	alluded to
47:29-31	Hebrews 11:21	alluded to
48:20	Hebrews 11:21	alluded to
49:8-9	Revelation 5:5	alluded to
49:33	Acts 7:15	alluded to
50:12-14	Acts 7:16	alluded to
50:24	Hebrews 11:22	alluded to
50:25	Hebrews 11:22	alluded to

Bibliography

The following sources were consulted for this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions. Where the study mentions background from history or archaeology, it does so in general terms and notes where scholars disagree.

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