

1 Genesis: In the Beginning

1. **Written by whom?**

The book does not say. Tradition points to Moses as the author of the first five books of the Bible, but the events of Genesis take place prior to his birth, so he could not have witnessed any of them. Moses could have collected the stories and histories, and being raised as Egyptian royalty, he would have had the education and access to histories to compile such a book. Moses also would have had the time during his lifetime to write Genesis. There are historical and cultural clues (polygamy practices, city names, etc.) in Genesis itself that indicate its time of writing as the late patriarchal period, so Moses and Joshua may be our best candidates.

2. **Written when and where?**

The book deals with prehistorical time periods and doesn't give information that can be directly linked to historical records, though internal evidence as mentioned above seems to indicate the late patriarchal period (1600 – 1300 BCE) as a possibility. There is no indication where it was written, but it seems possible that the stories were written during the 40 years of wandering.

3. **Written to whom?**

To the Hebrew people.

4. **What form?**

Historical narrative and poetry.

5. **What's it about?**

Beginnings. The first word in the ancient text is 'bereshith' - meaning 'in the beginning'. It is about God creating the universe, the earth, people, animals, plants, etc. The first human society. The flood. God's plan to redeem humanity through the line of Abraham. The beginnings of the nation of Israel.

6. **Written for what purpose?**

To help the Israelites learn and remember their history. Also, to teach God's plan for redemption, how he wanted his people to live.

2 Genesis Chapter 1 – Scripture Questions

1. When were the heavens and earth created? (v. 1)
2. What was over the surface of the deep? (vs. 2)
3. What were the first words of God? (vs. 3)
4. On day one, what did God call the light and the dark? (vs. 5)
5. On day two, what did God call the vault above the waters? (vs. 8)
6. On day three, what did God call the dry ground and the waters? (vs. 10)
7. On day four, what did the two great lights govern? (vs. 18)
8. On day five, what did God say to the creatures of the sea and sky? (vs. 22)
9. On day six, what did God think of all that he had made? (vs. 31)

3 Genesis Chapter 1 – What Did It Mean to Them?

The first chapter is about who created everything (God) and what he made (the cosmos, the earth, dry land and sea, sun and moon, plants, animals and lastly, humans). The book of Genesis starts with the words 'in the beginning' and does indeed deal with many, many firsts. From the creation of the universe, to the first murder, to the first human societies, it is the story of beginnings and the scope is very broad.

There are several major sections, including:

1. The creation
2. The story of Adam and his family
3. The story of the flood
4. The story of Abraham and his family
5. The story of Isaac and his family
6. The story of Jacob and his family
7. The story of Joseph and his years in Egypt

4 Genesis Chapter 1 – Application Questions

1. Genesis is concerned with who created everything (God) but is vague about when (in the beginning). Is this important? Why or why not?
2. Is the creation narrative a scientific, step by step ordering of what was made, when? Why or why not?
3. Was everything made in six twenty-four hour days? Why not over billions of years? Why not in six seconds?
4. In verse 26, God says, 'let us make mankind in our image'. Does this mean there were multiple gods involved in creation?

5 Genesis Chapter 2 – Scripture Questions

1. When God finished creating our world, how did he mark the event? (vs. 2, 3)
2. What story seems to begin again? (vs. 4)
3. This version of the creation story skims through the land/sea creation. Which creation gets more attention? (vs. 7)
4. Where did the Lord God 'plant' humanity? (vs. 8)
5. How did God make Eden delightful? What two trees are mentioned in the Garden? (vs. 9)
6. Were there any restrictions on the way the man enjoyed the Garden? What would happen if he disobeyed? (vs. 16, 17)
7. What did God create first, in order that the Man would not be alone? Was it good enough? (vs. 19, 20)
8. How did Adam respond to the creation of Woman? (vs. 23)
9. What relationship instruction is added at this point to the creation story? (vs. 24)
10. Returning to the creation story, how are the Man and Woman described? (vs. 25)

6 Genesis Chapter 2 – What Did It Mean to Them?

This section of Genesis is one example of how different documents were combined in order to give a clear picture of God's close involvement with the natural world and humanity. Chapter one is the 'high level' view, showing the Lord's complete mastery over nature. Chapter two focuses more on his creation of humanity, and we see that from the very beginning we were intended to live in a beautiful world, in harmony with one another and nature. Even the story of the creation of Eve shows that we are all interconnected, literally a part of one another.

The word "Eden" means "delight". The description of this perfect place includes beautiful lush trees, rivers, a place with unlimited resources. It is probably no coincidence that a nomadic people, who spent so much time in the desert, would use this type of language to describe a place of perfect safety, rest, and abundance. In this story we can see not only the way God *intended* his relationship with us to function, but the way his people *longed* for the return of this relationship. We can also see that God made all the provision for his people: humanity was the recipient of God's grace, even in the beginning. This grace echoes down through history, reaching fullness in Jesus who was the Word from the Beginning.

In the creation of Woman we find yet another instance of God's knowledge of what is 'good' for humanity. God alone knows what is good for humanity. In the first chapter the writer speaks of the creation of the human race in the 'image of God', and here we see that we are not meant to care for God's creation alone but in partnership with others. And like other times when God intervenes, it is done without man's help—in this story, he is asleep.

In this beginning time, Adam and Eve live in harmony with both the Lord and with his Creation. The end of the section says they were 'naked and unashamed'. This can mean physically naked, but it is more likely that it means they were living in obedience to the Lord. Later on, after the Fall, they were spiritually naked: under the judgment of God for their sin.

7 Genesis Chapter 2 – Application Questions

1. The story of Creation is important because it shows that we, and our world, were deliberately created—and loved. How do you think this impacts our responsibility toward this world, and toward one another? What should we do to carry out this responsibility?
2. To people who lived in and near a desert, Eden was an oasis. What would your Eden look like?
3. If God is capable of creating the universe, why does he need our help maintaining it?
4. What part of the creation story resonates with you? Why?

8 Genesis Chapter 3 – Scripture Questions

1. Which clever animal used questions to begin deceiving humans? (vs. 1)
2. How did the Woman answer the question? (vs. 2, 3)
3. What did the serpent say was God's REAL reason for forbidding the tree? (vs. 5)
4. After deciding that it was worth the risk, what did the Man and Woman realize? (vs. 7)
5. When God came to visit, what did the Man and Woman do? (vs. 8)
6. On hearing their story, what did God realize had happened? (vs. 11)
7. How was blame shared for the disobedience of the Man and Woman? (vs. 12, 13)
8. The curse on the snake is considered to be the first prophecy of the Messiah. What does this prophecy include? (vs. 15)
9. How are the Woman and Man cursed for their disobedience? (vs. 16-19)
10. Even in their punishment, God does something to protect humanity—even though it does not seem like protection in the moment. What is this action taken by God? (vs. 22, 23)

9 Genesis Chapter 3 – What Did It Mean to Them?

If the first two chapters of Genesis detail what God's intentions were for his Creation (including humanity), then this chapter explains what happened when these intentions were thwarted by humanity's disobedience.

Instead of trusting God's teaching, Adam and Eve trusted the snake and their own ideas.

Instead of living in innocence, Adam and Eve were disobedient.

Instead of trusting God's presence, Adam and Eve hid from his presence.

Instead of supporting one another, Adam and Eve blamed one another (and the snake!) for their trouble.

Instead of an equal standing before God, Eve's sin put her into a position of subjection and pain.

Instead of a life of comfort and joy in Paradise, Adam's sin put him into unending hardship and difficulty.

Instead of living forever in God's presence, Adam and Eve lost the opportunity to live with him.

Instead of freedom, Adam and Eve were condemned to death and struggle.

These losses were the driving force behind all the rest of our Scripture. God wanted to bring all people back into the innocence, abundance, and joyful life of Paradise. That was Jesus' purpose: to be the bridge that made it possible to live fully as God's creation, freed from the curse of sin and death.

10 Genesis Chapter 3 – Application Questions

1. The story of the Fall of humanity is crucial to understanding why God sent Jesus to save us from sin and death. All through the Bible, writers reference this story as an explanation for the turmoil in the world, and as a way to talk about the brokenness of human beings. What should we do to try to make things better, or should we just leave it up to God?
2. The human instinct is to blame others for sin—usually to avoid consequences. How can we be aware of our own sins without obsessing over them? Would it be helpful, for instance, to keep a list of our sins? Why or why not?
3. It seems clear that God’s intent for humanity was NOT to have some people in power over others, but that we live equally before him. Does becoming a Christian take us out of this power structure? Why or why not?
4. Looking at our world today makes it very easy to see the struggle with death that was caused by sin. Does it make you long for Jesus to return, to see the end of the struggle? How can we resist despair?

11 Genesis Chapter 4 – Scripture Questions

1. After Cain and Abel were grown, what were their separate jobs? (vs. 2)
2. What offerings did the two men give to the Lord? (vs. 3, 4)
3. Why was Cain angry and resentful? (vs. 5)
4. How did the Lord warn Cain about his attitude? (vs. 7)
5. What did Cain do to his brother? How did he respond to the Lord's question? (vs. 8-10)
6. How was Cain cursed by the Lord for his sin? (vs. 10-12)
7. Instead of remorse or repentance for his sin, who was Cain concerned about? (vs. 13, 14)
8. Instead of a nomad life, what did Cain do? (vs. 16, 17)
9. Compare Eve's words after the birth of Cain and Abel to the list of Cain's descendents. Who is not mentioned? (vs. 17-22)
10. In contrast, how is the third son of Adam and Eve described? (vs. 25, 26)

12 Genesis Chapter 4 – What Did It Mean to Them?

The story of Cain and Abel is famous! And it raises all kind of questions: Why didn't God approve of Cain's offering? What kind of man was Cain, that he would kill his brother? Why didn't God stop the murder? Why did God choose the punishment he gave to Cain? What was the sign of Cain? Where did Cain's wife come from? Where were all the people from, that built the city of Enoch? It sounds like Cain's descendents were inventors, were they bad because of their ancestor? Was it a sin that Lamech had two wives? How long did these people live?

It is helpful to remember that this narrative was written down long after the fact. The writer was concerned about tracing the intimate involvement of the Lord with his people, and people are always interested in answering the question "How did we get to where we are now?" We may not have factual answers for many of these questions, but we can surmise that the intent was to show how some ancestors were faithful and obedient to the Lord, and some went their own way—just as Adam and Eve did in Eden.

It seems likely the heart of Cain had been aimed away from the Lord for some time, because hatred and the ability to kill don't spring up out of nothing. Nothing in the text indicates that the offering he gave was subpar. And because of that, we assume that it was his heart, his attitude, that was wrong. One startling note is that the Lord was still visiting and speaking with the family of Adam! Just like in Eden, he questions those who have sinned. Cain has the opportunity to confess. Instead, he lies—thereby sealing his fate. And that fate is separation from his people. This is a foreshadowing of the fate of all who reject God, which is to be separated from him.

The problem of 'where did Cain's wife come from' shows that this narrative, while true to God's intention for humanity, is not literally true (at least after Cain leaves home). The writer uses genealogy and the information about Seth (the third son) to show the two strains of humanity: those who base their power and importance in their own accomplishments, and those who worship the Lord and find their place in him.

13 Genesis Chapter 4 – Application Questions

1. The story of Cain and Abel has at least some bearing on WHY we give what we do to the Lord. Do we always need to have a good attitude about our gifts to God? Why or why not?
2. Our families of origin have an enormous effect on our faith journeys. Looking at your own family, was it a positive or negative effect for you? What choices have you made that are different from your family?
3. God seemed to be talking and visiting Cain and Abel in person. Would you like to have God visit you in person? Why or why not?
4. Most of the inventions and creations of Cain's descendants seem pretty good. It seems to be true that people who don't know, or follow, or care about God can do things that are beneficial to humanity. How should this affect our interaction with these creations? Should we even try to make distinctions, for instance to only read books by Christian writers, or buy goods from Christian retailers?

Genesis Chapter 5

The generations between Adam and Noah—the lineage of those who worshipped the Lord

Name	Years lived
Adam	930 (93)
Seth	912 (91)
Enosh	905 (90)
Kenan	910 (91)
Ma-halalel	895 (89)
Jared	962 (96)
Enoch	365 (taken by God)
Methuselah	969 (96)
Lamech	777 (77)
Noah	950 (95) (at 50, had three sons)

15 Genesis Chapter 6 – Scripture Questions

1. What happened as the population of the earth grew? (vs. 1, 2)
2. How did the Lord change the lifespan of humanity? (vs. 3)
3. What happened to the heart and imagination of humans, and how did it make God feel? (vs. 5, 6)
4. What did the Lord decide to do? (vs. 7)
5. Who did the Lord decide to save, and why? (vs. 8, 9)
6. How does the writer describe the condition of the world? (vs. 11, 12)
7. What warning did God give to Noah? (vs. 13, 14)
8. How did God plan to cleanse the earth? (vs. 17)
9. What was the covenant that the Lord made with Noah? (vs. 18)
10. How did Noah respond to the Lord's commands? (vs. 22)

Ark

The word translated as “ark” is a loan word from the Egyptian that means “palace”. As described here, the size is comparable to a small cargo ship.

16 Genesis Chapter 6 – What Did It Mean to Them?

The genealogical list in chapter 5 seems a tad boring to just read through, but there are at least two significant points. First, the “likeness” of God and his naming of Adam is significant because it shows the pattern of God as the ultimate Father of all. Second, the words “walked with God” used of Enoch show that being in communion and close relationship with God removes the death sentence caused by sin.

The opening of chapter 6 has an odd and (to our modern minds) peculiar narrative: that of the ‘sons of God’. There are three main ways of understanding this. These beings were 1) angels (the oldest idea), 2) royalty (also an old idea), and 3) devout men from the ‘line of Seth’. The first view, that they were angels, seems to be contradicted by Matthew 22:30 where Jesus says, “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” We tend to take Jesus’ word for this, so it seems unlikely that they were angels.

The most common way of understanding who these ‘sons of God’ were is that they were descendents of Seth. This odd narrative, then, is a reminder that Adam’s children had greatly increased in number, with marriage and children born; in other words, a picture of everyday life. The term ‘Nephilim’ is found in other places in the Pentateuch (first five books of our Bible) and appears to refer to great men of antiquity. It is possible that the word is simply a generic term that means ‘great men’.

It is easy to see why God was grieved over the world. Humanity had devolved into evil and sin. One way to look at the Flood narrative is not that God destroyed the world, but that he found Noah worthy of saving—because Noah walked with God. Obedience to God’s commands and faithful trust in God’s provisions brings salvation.

17 Genesis Chapter 6 – Application Questions

1. At this time, the Lord was still dealing directly with those who ‘walked with the Lord’. Now, those of us who are believers have the Holy Spirit within us to teach and instruct us on the way to live obediently. Is it possible that this network of believers, inhabited by the Holy Spirit, is the reason God has not (yet!) wiped the planet clean?
2. It is possible that one point of the Flood narrative is to show what is necessary to avoid death: obedience and faithful trust in the Lord. Have you had “Flood” experiences in your life? How did you survive?
3. There are many flood narratives, from peoples all around the globe. SOMETHING enormous and significant happened, huge enough to be enshrined in stories handed down for generations. What does this make you think about the story of Noah?

18 Genesis Chapter 7-9 – Scripture Questions

1. **Read 7:5-12.** How long were Noah and his family in the Ark before the flood began covering the earth?
2. Where was the water coming from, and how long did it rain?
3. **Read 7:13-20.** Who closed the door on the ark?
4. What was the striking visual fact that the flood was massive and world-breaking?
5. **Read 8:1-4.** What did God do to stop the flood? How long did it take?
6. **Read 8:20-22.** After he was on dry land again, what did Noah do?
7. What promise did the Lord make, while recognizing the sinful hearts of humanity?
8. **Read 9:1-7.** How did the relationship between humanity and animal kind change after the flood?
9. What were the consequences of killing a human being?
10. **Read 9:8-13.** What promise did God make to Noah and his family, and how did he mark this promise?
11. **Read 9:20-25.** How did Noah fail to live rightly after he began farming?
12. In his shame and embarrassment, what did Noah do to his youngest son, Ham?

19 Genesis Chapter 7-9 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Reading over chapter 7, there is a great deal of information about Noah, his age, the people who were with him, the types of animals and birds he took along at God's command. It is a bit startling to realize that the people and animals who died are barely mentioned. Four times it is repeated that "Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark." The point being made by the author is clear: obedience to the Lord is the way to salvation. If you assume that Moses is the one writing, it is easy to see that he wanted to use this story as a way to motivate the Israelites following him in the desert. As Noah and his family were in God's hands on the floodwaters, so the Israelites were in God's hand in the desert. Only trust and faith in God's leading would lead to their salvation. It is likely no mistake that Canaan, Ham's son, is mentioned as being cursed. The Israelites were supposed to be going into the land of Canaan, and they needed to be reminded that it was NOT part of God's plan for them to intermarry with these people.

We see another lesson in the length of time it takes before Noah and his family are released from the ark. They had to wait and wait until God gave the command to leave the ark. The picture that we get here is that of Noah as a righteous and faithful remnant, patiently waiting for God's deliverance. Noah is obedient, and leaves at God's moment, and it is a new beginning. Moses, as he wrote this narrative, would see another alignment between Noah and the people he led. Only those faithful and trusting of the Lord would see the new, promised land. Those who rejected obedience died.

There is a parallel between the narrative of God's calling Noah out of the ark and the call of Abraham. Both Noah and Abraham represent new beginnings. God gives a promise of blessing and a covenant to both. Humanity is fallen, but there is still forgiveness available. Just as in the Creation narrative God had a garden for humanity to enjoy, so now Noah plants an orchard, with remarkably similar results. Noah took the fruits of the orchard and became naked, just as Adam and Eve recognized their nakedness after eating the forbidden fruit. Noah, just like Adam, sinned, and the effects of that sin followed through generations. The sons of Noah belonged to two groups of humankind, those who recognize their sinfulness before God (like Adam and Eve) and those who (like the Canaanites) have no sense of their sinfulness.

Genesis Chapter 7-9 – Application Questions

1. The Flood narrative seems to imply that obedience was necessary for salvation of Noah and his family. In our faith tradition, obedience to Jesus' commands is a **response** to the salvation we receive by faith in him. What do you think? Is it possible to be obedient to the call of faith before we are saved, or only after? How important is obedience? Is it fair of God to expect total obedience?
2. For Noah, deliverance was literally a matter of life and death. What does **deliverance** look like for us? Is it strictly spiritual deliverance now? From what do we need deliverance?
3. Sin is what separates people from God. While we who are in Christ are saved from some of the *consequences* of our sin, especially from eternal separation from God, it isn't hard to see the effects of sin in the world around us. Do you think sin is more about the actual things people do, or is 'sin' more a matter of where our hearts are committed?

21 Genesis Chapter 12 – Scripture Questions

1. Who/what was Abram supposed to leave behind? Where was he to go? (vs. 1)
2. What was the first promise given to Abram? (vs. 2)
3. Who went with Abram when he started on his journey? (vs. 5)
4. When Abram and his small tribe arrived in Canaan, what promise was added to the first one? (vs. 7)
5. Why did Abram take his tribe to Egypt? (vs. 10)
6. Sarai was evidently extremely attractive. What lie did Abram ask her to tell in order to save his own life? (vs. 13)
7. Who took Sarai into his harem? (vs. 15)
8. How did God punish the king and his palace for marrying Sarai? (vs. 17)
9. The king was exasperated and angry about Abram's lie. What did he tell Abram to do? (vs. 19)
10. After this crisis, what did Abram do? (vs. 20)

22 Genesis Chapter 12 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Noah-Shem-Arpachshad-Shelah-Eber-Peleg-Reu-Serug-Nahor-Terah-Abram. If you count, you will see that there are ten generations listed between Noah and Abram. Once again we see this type of genealogy; was it actually only ten generations? Maybe. Was it the greatest names of descendants? Maybe. We have to remember who the target was for this listing. Moses was giving his followers a sense of the history behind them, and an understanding that God had been caring for and protecting his people for a very long time.

Terah actually had three sons. There was Abram, Nahor, and Haran (Lot's father). They were all born in the city of Ur in Chaldea. Ur was on the main trade route from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean Sea, and Chaldea was a region at the head of the Persian Gulf. Haran died early. Nahor married Haran's daughter. For some reason (we aren't told why) Terah decides to move the family from Ur to the land of Canaan when he is around 100 years old. However, they only got as far as the city of Haran, which was about 550 miles northwest of Ur. They stayed there until Terah died, which was about 100 years later.

The story of Abram begins with a calling from the Lord to leave Haran. He was not given a final destination, just told to go. Abram, Sarai, the nephew Lot packed up everything they owned (including slaves) and moved out. Abram moved under the umbrella of God's promise: "Everyone on earth will be blessed because of you." The Lord also promised that the land of Canaan would be given to Abram's family forever. There are frequent repetitions of God's blessing throughout the narratives of Abraham. He is a kind of new Adam. Those who bless him, God will bless, those who curse him, God will curse. The way of 'life and blessing', which in Eden was marked by the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil', and then by the ark, is now marked by identification with Abraham and his descendants.

The story of Abraham's stay in Egypt is much like the story of the Israelites. What he did for Abraham, he did for his people in slavery, and he will do for us today. Behind all the stories is a loving God who cares for his people.

23 Genesis Chapter 12 – Application Questions

1. Honestly, following God's call seems a lot clearer when you get a direct command from him. No guessing what he wants—he just tells you! There seems to be an awful lot of guesswork needed for us. How has God called you? Did you figure out it was him pretty quickly, or did it take time? How long did you wait to be sure it was God calling?
2. Moses is giving the story of Abraham as a way of connecting the Israelites to their history and as a way to encourage them to obedience. (It probably didn't hurt that Abraham was a nomad like them.) How has your history affected your faith journey? Have you attempted to share your history with others? How did they react?
3. Later in Genesis (20:12) we find out the Sarah actually IS Abraham's half-sister, so he wasn't telling a complete lie to the Egyptian king. Is it okay to lie if you are protecting yourself? Why or why not?

24 Genesis Chapter 13 – Scripture Questions

1. After they left Egypt, where did Abram and Sarai go? Who went with them? (vs. 1)
2. How is Abram described? (vs. 2)
3. What did Abram do when he returned to Bethel and Ai? (vs. 4)
4. Between Abram and Lot, they owned a LOT of livestock. What was the problem in the new location? (vs. 6, 7)
5. What was Abram's solution to the problems he and Lot were having? (vs. 9)
6. What location did Lot choose? Why did he like it? (vs. 10, 11)
7. How is Lot's new home described? (vs. 13)
8. What does the Lord promise to Abram? (vs. 15, 16)
9. When Abram moved to Hebron, how did he honor the Lord? (vs. 18)

Mamre, full Hebrew name Elonei Mamre, 'Oaks of Mamre', refers to an ancient religious site originally focused on a single holy tree, growing "since time immemorial" at Hebron in Canaan. At its first location, Khirbet Nimra, a pagan tree cult predated the biblical narrative. It is best known from the biblical story of Abraham and the three visitors. The tree under which he had pitched his tent is known as the oak or terebinth of Mamre.



Genesis Chapter 13 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Nomads lived a very simple life and because of their constant travels they could not carry a great number of supplies and equipment. Their major possession is the tent made of goat hair, the poles, stakes and ropes for supporting the tent, a curtain to divide the tent into two parts (male and female sides) and a carpet for the floor. The nomad's wealth was measured by the size of their flocks and herds which supplied them with most of their needs including milk, meat, skin, hair for tents, horns for trumpets and liquid containers and many other odds and ends.

Cooking supplies and equipment consisted of bags made of skins for carrying food reserves such as grains and dried fruits, a few utensils such as spoons, knives and bowls and a grinding mill for making flour out of grains. They also carried some harvesting supplies such as sickles and mattocks to gather crops when available. For defense, they carried weapons such as the bow and arrow, spears and knives. Many of the weapons were used for other purposes such as butchering knives, mattocks and the tent poles which were sharp at one end for spears.

The men would often gather together, usually at meal times, to discuss past events, needs, locations and other details of operating the camp. The women gathered together to prepare foods, make clothing and make tent repairs. Storytelling was probably one of the most important forms of entertainment. The older members of the clan would tell the stories of their history to the children in order to pass on the experiences of the tribe and clans to the next generation.

One of the major responsibilities of the clan was to provide hospitality to anyone who comes to them. This might be a member of a related clan or even an enemy of another tribe. In both cases it was the responsibility of the clan to provide food, shelter and protection as long as they were within their camp.

The religion of the nomads was very different from our understanding of religion. The whole of the nomads life was religion. As their very existence was dependent upon rain, they understood that their lives were in God's hands at all times. The nomad saw the power, justice, love and mercy of God in all things and all activities (such as eating, making shelter, working, etc.) was seen as a service to God. The nomad lived in harmony with his surroundings and understood this life as being one with God who created all things. In short, their lives were one long prayer to God.

Source: Ancient Hebrew Research Center, <https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/culture/hebrews-nomadic-lifestyle.htm>

26 Genesis Chapter 13 – Application Questions

1. As Moses relates this narrative about Abram's travels, he makes it clear that Abram was a wealthy man. In our denomination, we are very cautious not to say that following Jesus will make us financially successful. Why was it useful to the Lord to make Abram rich? What does money represent to you?
2. The answer to crowding of people and livestock, for Abram and Lot, was to separate. Churches sometimes do this, both as an answer to growth and as a result of conflict. How does separation affect people? What do you think Jesus' feelings about separation would be?
3. One of the ways we know Abram worshipped the Lord was that he built altars to honor him. What can we do as a class to show that we honor the Lord? What do you think would happen if we prayed that the Holy Spirit would show us a way to honor the Lord?

27 Genesis Chapter 14/15 – Scripture Questions

1. **Read 14:14-24.** Why did Abram take a force of 318 fighting men on a raid? (14:14)
2. How do we know Abram was successful? (14:15, 16)
3. Who came out to congratulate Abram when he returned to his encampment? (14:17, 18)
4. How did Melchizedek bless Abram? (14:19, 20)
5. Although the King of Sodom offered the spoils of battle to Abram, what did Abram accept? (14:23, 24)
6. **Read 15:1-18.** What was Abram's concern about the rewards from the Lord? (15:2, 3)
7. How did the Lord reassure Abram? (15:4, 5)
8. What was it about Abram that the Lord accepted as righteousness? (15:6)
9. What does the Lord say to Abram which is important to Moses' listeners/readers? (15:13, 14)
10. How does the Lord comfort Abram about his future? (15:15, 18)

Genesis Chapter 14/15 – What Did It Mean to Them?

At first glance, the opening of chapter 14 seems like a lot of names and political jockeying—but it does connect back to Abram. Most city-states of this time were ruled by people who styled themselves as ‘King’. Smaller places almost always had to pay tribute (taxes) to larger ones—protection money, actually. (“Send us \$XX each year, and we won’t invade you.”) In this narrative, there were five smaller kings in the west that seem to have paid for 12 years, but then in the 13th year they didn’t pay. The king in the east (whom they were supposed to be paying) gathered up three allies and went on an invasion trip. They swooped around the rebels, taking out some potential troublemakers, then drove through the five western territories. Though a couple of the western kings seem to have survived (or at least were quickly replaced), the four eastern kings scooped up people and goods from the conquered territories—including Lot, who seems by this time to have moved into Sodom.

Abram was, at this time, living near the oaks of Mamre. He had already entered into a defensive alliance with three Amorite brothers, Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner. Why were these three groups willing to be allies with Abram? There are several possible reasons: 1) They probably saw Abram as a rich and powerful person, 2) They may have been aware that Abram had recently returned from Egypt with a lot of treasure and assumed that the Pharaoh was Abram’s patron, and 3) Abram may have told them that his God had promised to bless anyone who blessed him. At any rate, Abram was able to lead a group of 318 trained fighters against the eastern kings. God’s promise to Abram held, and Abram and his allies were able to recover the people, food, and spoils—including Lot and his possessions. One point we can take from this is that the armies were not, in our understanding, huge numbers of people. The eastern king’s troops may have been no more than 1,000, and probably much less than that.

The King of Salem, Melchizedek becomes a symbol of righteousness. We see him appearing first here but also in Psalms and Hebrews. This king was evidently known to, and a follower of, Abram’s God. We don’t know how or when this occurred, and we have no knowledge of what he did after this encounter with Abram. We know that he blessed Abram, and that Abram gave him a tithe of everything that had been recovered. In Psalms, Melchizedek is said to be a priest forever. In Hebrews, Melchizedek is used as an example of how God is the one who makes High Priests. The writer of Hebrews is making a case for Jesus as our high priest. This is meaningful because the Jews of Jesus’ time insisted that only people who marked their lineage through Aaron and Levi could serve as priests. The writer of Hebrews knew that Melchizedek was accepted as a High Priest of Yahweh, and so said that Jesus also was our High Priest, chosen by God.

Genesis Chapter 14/15 – Application Questions

1. Like Abraham and Melchizedek, God still wants his people to be a blessing to others. Jesus taught this: he said, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 5:16). What does our church do to bless others? What can our class do to be a blessing to others? (And who are these ‘others’?)
2. Abram went to save Lot—and the people from Sodom—without making a decision about whether or not they deserved being saved. They were helpless, and needed someone to save them, so Abram went. Should we be like this, helping people who need it without checking to see if they deserve it?
3. In 15:6, Abram believed in the Lord, and he was given credit for being righteous. This was a gift to Abram because of his faith. Acts 16:31 says, “Have faith in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved!” Can salvation really be this simple? If salvation is simple, why is the Christian life afterwards so complicated?

30 Genesis Chapter 16 – Scripture Questions

1. What plan did Sarai come up with to solve the problem of lacking a son? (16:1, 2)
2. What did Abram think about Sarai's plan? (16:3)
3. What affect did Hagar's pregnancy have on Sarai? (16:4)
4. Who did Sarai blame for the trouble between the women? (16:5)
5. How did Abram handle the problem? What was the result for Hagar? (16:6)
6. Who did Hagar meet on her way to Shur? What did he ask her? (16:7, 8)
7. What promise did Hagar receive? (16:9-12)
8. Hagar was amazed by her encounter. What name did she give the Lord? (16:13)
9. How old was Abram when Ishmael was born? (16:15, 16)

31 Genesis Chapter 16 – What Did It Mean to Them?

We shouldn't be too harsh on Sarai. In their culture, a male child to perpetuate the family line was imperative, and a barren wife was shamed. Sarai likely believed that she had no choice. She was around 85 years old at this time, so it is reasonable to think that menopause had ruled out any chance of natural pregnancy.

In the ancient Near East, the barrenness of a wife or her inability to bear a son were perfectly acceptable reasons for polygamy. The husband could either take a second wife or have a son through a slave or servant girl. The law codes in ancient Mesopotamia—where Abram and Sarai were born and lived before they arrived in Canaan—had allowances for this type of arrangement. A child born in this union would be counted as the child of the first wife and would have legal rights as a legitimate offspring of the marriage.

Sarai probably felt trapped. She didn't want a rival wife with equal legal standing with herself, so the least objectionable option was to use a servant girl as a surrogate mother. Abram, on the other hand, really dropped the ball with his response. In a sense, Abram reenacted the “fall of man” because he listened to Sarai instead of trusting God and following His word. The rivalry, resentment, and instability that inevitably occurred are stark examples of the flaws in polygamous marriages.

When Hagar ran away, she was running toward Egypt, her homeland. She had been with Sarai and Abram at least ten years, but was treated so harshly by Sarai that she was willing to go alone across the desert (nearly 100 miles, on foot) to go home. Near a desert spring she encounters the angel of the Lord. In the ancient Near East, a royal messenger was to be treated as a stand-in for the king himself. In Bible narratives, the angel of the Lord spoke as God and appeared to be God. This visitation (and the promise of a safe birth and many descendents) was enough to encourage Hagar to return to Abram's encampment.

The description of Ishmael and his descendents must be understood in light of the peoples that Moses' followers had (most likely) encountered during their time in the desert. On the fringes of the great Arabian Desert, Ishmaelite caravans crossed and recrossed the deserts from Mesopotamia to Egypt, sometimes trafficking in human slaves. Other Ishmaelites, along with various Bedouin groups, raided and plundered the permanent settlements in Canaan. No doubt the nomadic Hebrew people encountered them on their 40-year trek around the desert before settling in Canaan.

It is easy to see how the current struggles between Arabic and Jewish people have their origins in the lack of trust Abram and Sarai had towards the Lord. Who knows how much agony the world could have been spared if only they had trusted Him?

32 Genesis Chapter 16 – Application Questions

1. Sarai tried to help God's promise along, with fairly eternal consequences. Do we still do this? Why shouldn't we do what we can to make God's plan more successful? How can we tell the difference between God's plans and our own?
2. Why do you think Hagar was told to go back to the place where she was treated badly? Should we stay in situations where we aren't treated fairly? Why or why not?
3. Sarai and Abram's cultural background made their choice a reasonable one, from their understanding and experience. What cultural allowances should we make today when people become Christians, in terms of lifestyle and behavior?

33 Genesis Chapter 17 – Scripture Questions

1. At the end of chapter 16, Abram was 86. How old is he now? How old does that make Ishmael? (vs. 1)
2. If Abram is blameless, what will God do for him? (vs. 2)
3. What happens after God confirms the covenant? (vs. 5-8)
4. What was the condition for the descendents of Abraham? (vs. 10)
5. Which male children did this apply to? (vs. 13)
6. Who else had their name changed, and what promise did she receive? (vs. 15, 16)
7. How did Abraham respond to all these pronouncements from God? (vs. 17)
8. Abraham was concerned about Ishmael. What promise did God make for this son? (vs. 20)
9. When was Sarah to expect a child? (vs. 21)
10. After his encounter with God, what did Abraham do? (vs. 23-27)

34 Genesis Chapter 17 – What Did It Mean to Them?

After a long silence, God speaks to Abram again. It may seem that the Lord makes impossible demands on Abram, saying “Walk before me, and be blameless.” Is God calling Abraham to a perfect life of sinless obedience? No, because this would only lead to despair and frustration. Rather, to “walk before” means that Abraham should always be aware of the Lord’s presence in his life. God would be Abraham’s constant companion and would never leave him or forsake him. To be “blameless” never means a life of sinless perfection; it means to be “complete”, or “wholehearted” in your commitment to the Lord.

One significant feature of this covenant, or contract, between the Lord and Abraham was that it would be with Abraham’s descendents. In the covenant with Noah, which was for ‘every living creature,’ ‘for all successive generations,’ this new covenant was ONLY for Abraham and Sarah’s descendents. Later on this will be narrowed down to Isaac and then Jacob. The descents of Isaac’s older son Esau would be excluded, along with Abraham’s children through Hagar and Keturah.

Reading God’s promise about “an everlasting covenant” and “everlasting possession” of the land of Canaan might bring up questions about current day ownership of this land. However, the Hebrew word for “everlasting” often means only an ‘age’. This time period could be as short as three days (see the way Jonah describes his time in the great fish) or it might be a lifetime (Hannah’s promise of Samuel’s ‘forever’ dedication to the Lord was understood as being only for his lifetime). The New Testament clearly teaches that God’s special relationship with physical Israel has ended. God’s people today are not under the law (meaning the law of Moses). Our participation in the new covenant is through Jesus, and the gospel is for all nations. Those of us who are in the family of God are there by faith and baptism. We are the new descendants of Abraham.

Circumcision was well known in the ancient Near East. Archaeological research has uncovered examples of circumcised Syrian warriors from the third millennium B.C., and there is Egyptian evidence for it from the 23rd century B.C. There were also Canaanite and Arab groups known to have practiced, although those from Mesopotamia (Abraham’s original home) and the Philistines (from the Greek islands) did not. There is some evidence that circumcision was practiced to ward off evil spirits, as a rite of passage into manhood performed at the age of puberty, or as preparation for marriage. For Abraham and his descendants, however, it would have been a private sign that they were a chosen people, called, blessed, and with a divine destiny.

35 Genesis Chapter 17 – Application Questions

1. It had been 13 YEARS since Abraham had heard from the Lord. It's safe to say that he had probably gotten resigned to having Ishmael as his heir. What promise of God seems (to you) very far from being fulfilled? How can we keep our hopes up while waiting?
2. Circumcision was the sign chosen by the Lord to prove Abraham's commitment to him. What is the sign of our commitment to following Jesus? Do you think it would help us to have some kind of physical sign of our commitment, like a tattoo or brand? Why or why not?
3. EVERY male in Abraham's family/clan had to be circumcised. (Do you wonder if anyone left the camp because of this requirement?) Now, as followers of Jesus, we have what Paul called 'circumcision of the heart', and it is very much an individual thing. What activities does our congregation provide to give us a 'community' feeling?

36 Genesis Chapter 18 – Scripture Questions

1. What guests appeared to Abraham during a hot summer day? (vs. 1, 2)
2. How did Abraham react to his visitors? (vs. 2-5)
3. What food was offered to his visitors? (vs. 6-8)
4. Who did the visitors ask about? (vs. 9)
5. What did one of the guests prophesy? How did Sarah react? (vs. 10-12)
6. Where were the guests headed after their visit with Abraham? (vs. 16)
7. Why did the Lord decide to tell Abraham about his plans for Sodom? (vs. 17-19)
8. What did the Lord want to verify about the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah? (vs. 20, 21)
9. How did Abraham talk the Lord down from fifty to ten godly people as the measure for preserving the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah? (vs. 23-32)
10. Where did the Lord go after letting Abraham talk him into mercy for the people of Sodom? (vs. 33)

37 Genesis Chapter 18 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Abraham's actions with his visitors was an example of ancient Near Eastern hospitality. When people lived on the fringes of urban centers and didn't often see or entertain guests, they tended to react with pleasure and to make an effort to please their guests. It was also true that hosts had an obligation to take care of the guests' needs and safety while they were with him. Abraham seemed to be taking seriously his obligation to "be a blessing" to others.

Women didn't usually mingle with male visitors, so it must have been a surprise when these asked after Sarah—and by name, no less! This was probably Abraham's first clue that these guests were not ordinary men. Sarah, for her part, was embarrassed to have her private unbelief made public. Even though people of this time had more willingness to believe in divine intervention, she knew that her body was past menopause. God has often used people and events that seem impossible in order to make his power evident.

Abraham, as a good host, escorted his three visitors toward their next stop. They may have traveled about three miles to the hills east of Hebron, from which some of the Dead Sea was visible about 18 miles farther east. We don't know exactly where ancient Sodom was located, but many think it was located at the southern end of the Dead Sea. There have been excavations all around the Sea. Although some remains have been discovered, there is no real agreement about where these Biblical cities were located. There are some people who think that the ruins of Sodom are under the waters of the sea, others who think they simply haven't dug in the right spot.

The Lord said that there was an 'outcry' against Sodom and Gomorrah. Later on, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Amos compared the social injustices committed by the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah to Sodom and Gomorrah. In the New Testament, Peter described their lives as being characterized by ungodliness, immoral living, and lawless acts. Peter also said that these actions were a torment to Lot.

Abraham's persuasive talk with the Lord seems odd to us, but he was acting as a prophet. True justice demanded that God discriminate between the righteous and the wicked. This difference can be found as a theme throughout the Bible, and it is the basis for the final judgment at the end of time. Abraham was no doubt aware that there was sin and corruption in Sodom; this desire for appropriate justice reminds Moses' readers that obedience to the Lord would bring about salvation, while disobedience would bring death.

38 Genesis Chapter 18 – Application Questions

1. Hospitality was a matter of life and death to nomadic peoples. What does “hospitality” mean to you? How important is it to our Christian life?
2. Nobody blames Sarah for laughing when she heard the visitor say she was going to have a baby. Did this show a lack of faith on her part? We believe that Jesus rose from the dead, which many non-believers find laughable. How do you answer that kind of scorn?
3. Abraham was, no doubt, trying to save his nephew Lot when he talked the Lord down to only ten righteous people to save the city. No doubt he thought—or hoped—that Lot had that many righteous people in his family or clan. How do you feel about destroying a large group of people because they don’t meet God’s standards, especially since they did not seem to be followers of Yahweh? Why should unbelievers be held to God’s standards?

39 Genesis Chapter 19 – Scripture Questions

1. Where was Lot when the two angels came to the gate of Sodom? How did he greet them? (vs. 1)
2. What did Lot offer the visitors? (vs. 2, 3)
3. How did the townspeople react to the presence of the visitors? (vs. 4, 5)
4. Who was offered up as a sacrifice to the attackers? (vs. 6-8)
5. After the mob tried to snatch Lot and break down his door, who saved him? What did they do to the mob? (vs. 9-11)
6. Who was Lot told to try and save? Why? Did they believe him? (vs. 12-14)
7. When Lot was hesitant to leave the town, what did the angels do? (vs. 15-17)
8. After Lot FINALLY ran away with his wife and two unmarried daughters, what happened? (vs. 23-26)
9. How did God honor Abraham's request? (vs. 29)
10. What terrible decision did Lot's daughters make? (30-38)

Genesis Chapter 19 – What Did It Mean to Them?

So far, our study of people of faith have been centered around those people who followed the Lord, if imperfectly. Today we see how people who go their own way bring about not only their own destruction, but the destruction of their families and friends.

The description of Lot makes clear that he had completely exchanged his nomadic life for an urban life. The gate of a walled city served as the main entrance. This is where business was transacted, where court cases were heard and judged, and where people gathered to visit, gossip, and see what was happening. While we don't know exactly why Lot was there, it is at least possible that he had attained a certain measure of respect from the locals, maybe even serving as one of the judges. At any rate, he welcomes the visitors very graciously. He seems startled by their plan to spend the night in the town square. We know, of course, that these angelic messengers were there to make certain of the depravity of the town. Lot only knew that their choice was dangerous, which certainly implies that he was aware of the moral and physical danger of the visitors.

The events that came next are horrifying on many levels. First is the mob that surrounds the house, demanding that the visitors be given to them for the purpose of gang rape. If we needed any further proof that the city was damned, this certainly provides that proof. Surely Lot knew the character of the people he lived near: why had he stayed? Why was he willing to marry his daughters to citizens of Sodom? Why was he willing to sacrifice his unmarried daughters to these bloodthirsty people? Why, after being personally saved from the evil of the mob, was he still reluctant to leave the next morning? Moses may have included this terrible story as a cautionary tale to his listeners, to make them aware of the dangers of leaving the worship of the Lord.

It may be helpful for us to remember that the Lord considered his relationship with Israel to be like marriage, with commitment to each other as a primary tie that bound Israel to the Lord. The citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah were idolaters, and their behavior showed that they did not even have respect for one another. The Lord's response to these cities is a stark lesson in the kind of outcome that can be expected for people who reject God's demand for faithfulness and purity of life. Moses no doubt wanted to encourage his listeners to remain committed to obedience to the Lord.

41 Genesis Chapter 19 – Application Questions

1. Lot and his family were completely assimilated into the city life of Sodom. Today, we are considered good citizens if we participate in activities sponsored by the cities around us. Where should we draw the line of assimilation? How do we know where that line is?
2. Everybody can see that a mob of people rarely act sensibly. A mob action almost always involves violence. Sometimes even legal protests can have individual members acting badly. Have you ever participated in a protest? How did it feel to be a part of a group that was united in a demand?
3. Lot's daughters committed incest with him, but they said they had a good reason. Do you think that having a good reason gives permission to do a bad thing? In other words, does the end ever justify the means?

42 Genesis Chapter 22 – Scripture Questions

1. What startling thing did God ask Abraham to do? (vs. 1, 2)
2. How did Abraham show obedience to God's command? (vs. 3-5)
3. What did Isaac ask Abraham? How did Abraham answer? (vs. 7, 8)
4. When Abraham prepared to kill Isaac, what did the Lord's angel do and say? (vs. 11-13)
5. What did Abraham name the mountain where this took place? (vs. 14)
6. How was the covenantal promise repeated to Abraham? (vs. 15-17)
7. What would come from the nations of the earth? (vs. 18)
8. After they returned from this expedition, what news came to Abraham? (vs. 20-24)
9. The name of Rebekah, Isaac's future wife, comes up in this family list. What relation was she to Abraham and Isaac? (vs. 23)

Genesis Chapter 20-22 – What Did It Mean to Them?

In chapter 20, there is a story which seems familiar to us: Abraham passes off Sarah as his 'sister' (which, technically, she was) in order to insure his own safety. In this case Abimelech, a king in south Canaan, is protected by God from having sexual relations with Sarah. God even talks to Abimelech in a dream and warns him to send Sarah back to Abraham. Knowing as we do how old Sarah was, it may be a bit confusing about Abimelech's willingness to take Sarah into his household. However, Abraham was wealthy, and Abimelech probably took Sarah as wife as a way to bind a treaty between himself and Abraham. One interesting point about this story is that not only did the Lord speak directly to Abimelech, but Abimelech's servants absolutely believed him about their danger. And why did the Lord not punish Abraham? This seems like a lack of faith on his part: was he trying to manipulate his future?

Chapter 21 brings the fulfillment that Abraham and Sarah have waited for (with varying degrees of belief), the birth of Isaac. The name "Isaac" means 'one who laughs or rejoices'. We can certainly understand why this is a fitting name, since both Abraham and Sarah have laughed about the possibility of a son! Now, though, the laughter is that of joy. It would be lovely to think that now the household was pleasant, but unfortunately there was trouble ahead. There was still bad blood between Sarah and Hagar. Sarah became convinced that Ishmael was a threat to her son, and demanded that Abraham get rid of this threat. Abraham wasn't happy about this, but God told him to follow through on Sarah's demand. Hagar and Ishmael were sent away with food and a skin of water. When they were near death, God came to Hagar and promised her again that her son would be a great nation. He showed her where a well of water was, and Hagar and Ishmael survived.

Abimelech comes back into the story, and he has concerns about Abraham. He acknowledges that God was with Abraham, and wanted Abraham to swear a treaty with him that would guarantee peace between them. Abraham did swear this treaty, and after settling a water dispute with Abimelech he stayed in the land of the Philistines for quite some time, going to far as to plant a tree as a witness to God's provision of water.

44 Genesis Chapter 22 – Application Questions

1. The idea of sacrificing a child is almost impossible to believe, but Abraham was willing to do this terrible thing. What is the hardest thing God has ever asked you to do?
2. After Isaac was saved by the angel, Abraham called the name of the place “The Lord provides,” transliterated from the original language as ‘Jehovah Jireh’. What has the Lord provided for our church?
3. Moses may have told this story of the near sacrifice of Isaac in order to reinforce to his followers the necessity for willingness to sacrifice and certainty of the Lord’s provision. What story from the Bible is most instructive and/or encouraging to you?

45 Genesis Chapter 24 – Scripture Questions

1. As he aged, what became very important to Abraham? (vs. 3, 4)
2. How did Abraham feel about his servant taking Isaac back to Abraham's original land? (vs. 8)
3. What did the servant take with him to the city of Nahor? (vs. 10)
4. At the city well, for what did the servant pray? (vs. 12-14)
5. What happened before he finished his prayer? Who was she? (vs. 15)
6. How was the servant's prayer fulfilled? (vs. 17-20)
7. After her brother Laban heard the story, how did he react? (vs. 31)
8. When the family heard the entire story from the servant, what did they say? (vs. 50, 51)
9. What blessing did Rebekah's family give her when she left? (vs. 60)
10. After the servant told Isaac the story of finding Rebekah, what did Isaac do? (vs. 67)

46 Genesis Chapter 24 – What Did It Mean to Them?

We are accustomed to story tropes, ideas that repeat across many stories. For example, in a western there is very often a gunfight between the sheriff (or marshal) at high noon. In a horror film, there is the moment when the people 'split up' to look for someone. In a romcom, there is always a 'meet cute' moment. In today's chapter we see an example of this in the story of finding Rebekah. In ancient literature, there would often be a scene when the protagonist meets his true love by the well. This made sense: a well was often a spot where socializing would take place, and anyone who knew the culture of 'being at the well' would recognize it as a good place to meet people. So when Moses' readers heard about the well, they had a good idea what would happen next. The difference here, of course, was that in this narrative God had gone ahead of the servant to bring Rebekah there at just the right time. This would reinforce to Moses' readers that God was involved in the most intimate details of his people's lives.

Another way to look at this narrative is to understand that Moses was trying to encourage his followers to marry other Hebrew people, and to understand that God was going before them to bring them to the land that had been promised. It must have been a great temptation to the Israelites to settle down in one place and marry among the people that they encountered. Moses used the story of one of the patriarchs as a template of faithfulness and trust.

A third understanding of this narrative involves the fact that it was most likely compiled during the time of Exile, after the Jews had been taken away into foreign lands. The rabbis and teachers would have wanted to encourage the Jewish people to hold tight to their heritage, to hold tight to the idea that God was still with them, and (as much as possible) marry within the tribes so as to maintain a clear lineage. This story, of Abraham's desire that Isaac take a wife from among Abraham's relatives, would reinforce all of these goals. The people living in exile would read (or hear) this narrative and remember that God had cared for his people for a very long time, and trust that he would continue to care for them even in foreign lands.

47 Genesis Chapter 24 – Application Questions

1. Learning about the history of your family makes you feel connected. What stories about our church do you know, if any?
2. What do you think about the fact that Abraham had to send a servant to find a wife for his son? Why didn't God just send Rebekah to Abraham's camp, rather than make him look for her? For that matter, why do we have to search out God's plans for us? What is the point of making us look—and worry if we got it right?
3. Even if Rebekah knew she was going to a (wealthy) relative's household, it was still pretty brave to just take off with one servant. When have you stepped out in faith to answer a call? How did you get your courage up?

48 Genesis Chapter 27 – Scripture Questions

1. When Isaac believed he was nearing the end of his life, what request did he make of Esau? (vs. 3, 4)
2. Who was listening to Isaac and Esau, and what did she do? (vs. 5-10)
3. How did Jacob object to Rebekah's plan? (vs. 11, 12)
4. What was Rebekah's answer to Jacob's objection? (vs. 13)
5. When Jacob showed up in Isaac's tent, dressed as Esau and carrying food and wine, what was the conversation between the two of them? (vs. 18-20)
6. After Jacob passed the initial deception, what did Isaac do? (vs. 23)
7. What final bit of trickery convinced Isaac that he was, in fact, blessing Esau? (vs. 27)
8. Right after Jacob left with the full blessing (and all the inheritance, too), who came in? (vs. 30)
9. How did Isaac and Esau react when they realized what had happened? (vs. 33-35)
10. What did Esau plan to do after Isaac's death, and how did Rebekah react? (vs. 41-44)

49 Genesis Chapter 25, 26 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Chapter 25 tells us about more of Abraham's descendants. After Sarah died, he took another wife named Keturah, and they had six sons (no way to know about daughters). Even though Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac, his son by Sarah, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines—who were subsequently sent away to live somewhere else. When Abraham finally died at 175, Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave next to Sarah. Ishmael had married an Egyptian woman and had 12 (twelve!) sons that grew into princes—meaning they grew wealthy and had settlements named after them.

At the end of the chapter listing all Abraham's other sons, we hear a more detailed account of Isaac. Isaac married Rebekah when he was 40 years old, but she evidently was childless for another 20 years, until Isaac prayed to the Lord for a child. It seems she had a difficult pregnancy. When she prayed to the Lord about the trouble, he told her that she was having twins, and that they would father two nations. When they were born, first out was Esau, a red-haired little boy. Next out was Jacob, who was holding on to Esau's heel. As adults, Esau was a skilled hunter and Jacob made his place 'in tents' which seemed to imply that he was more comfortable in civilized spaces. Isaac loved Esau best; Rebekah loved Jacob.

Here we find the story about Esau selling his birthright—his right to inherit everything from Isaac—to Jacob, because he was hungry after a long hunting episode. Jacob took advantage of Esau's hunger, true, but Esau showed that he was contemptuous of both his father and his brother by his willingness to give up this right. He may also have thought that Isaac would give it to him anyway, no matter what Jacob claimed.

In Chapter 26, Isaac copies Abraham by claiming Rebekah as sister—and to Abimelech, no less, the same Canaanite king that was tricked by Abraham! Eventually Isaac became very wealthy, and had to move away from the Philistine area of Gerar. He reopened wells that were dug by Abraham's people. Isaac had a vision from the Lord. The Lord repeated the promise given to Abraham of many descendants and blessings.

Lastly, we learn that Esau married two Hittite women, Judith and Basemath, which caused Isaac and Rebekah great anxiety.

Genesis Chapter 27 – Application Questions

1. Blessings were very significant to these ancient peoples. In what ways do we openly bless people today? What is it about these blessings that binds people together?
2. Both Abraham's and Isaac's families were dysfunctional in ways. What does this make you think about God's choice of these families for his people? Do you think it has any application for our families or our congregations today?
3. Jacob and Esau were very different, both physically and emotionally. There was a destructive competition between them—not to mention parental favoritism. What lessons can we learn from their dysfunction?

51 Genesis Chapter 28 – Scripture Questions

1. Rebekah needed to get Jacob away from Esau, so she told Isaac she was worried that Jacob would marry a Canaanite woman. What did Isaac do? (vs. 1, 2)
2. What blessing did Isaac give to Jacob? (vs. 3, 4)
3. What did Esau realize about his choice of wives? (vs. 6-8)
4. How did Esau “fix” this problem about marrying Canaanite women? (vs. 9)
5. When Jacob camped along the way to his uncle’s home, what did he dream? (vs. 12)
6. In Jacob’s dream, what promise did the Lord make to him? (vs. 13-15)
7. The next morning, how did Jacob feel about the place where he slept? (vs. 16, 17)
8. How did Jacob mark this sacred place? (vs. 18, 19)
9. What transactional promise (vow) did Jacob make? (vs. 20-22)

Genesis Chapter 28 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Isaac seems to want the best for his second son, even if he was aware of Jacob's nature. He reiterates the blessing given to Jacob earlier, and reminds Jacob of the blessing from Yahweh on the family. At this time, it seems likely that Jacob had no relationship with the Lord: that was the faith of Abraham and Isaac. Jacob may also have suffered from the problem that many rich children have, that they simply expect things to fall their way. There seems to be a bit of punishment from Isaac, though, since evidently he sent Jacob off without much in the way of supplies, and certainly without any servants. This was probably a wake-up call to Jacob that his life was going to change drastically.

Jacob's dream is famous—there is even a song called “Stairway to Heaven”. In ancient times, ziggurats were believed to be a connecting link between heaven and earth. On New Year's Day (and possibly other times) it was common to have a procession of kings and/or priests to climb the stairs up to the temples at the top to worship their gods. After the completed ceremonies, they would come back down the stairways, hoping that the new year would bring blessings. It is significant, then, that Jacob saw the Lord standing above the stairway. In this context, Jacob would understand that the Lord was above all other gods or divine beings. Another point Jacob learned was that the Lord (unlike pagan gods) was not bound to one location or family, but was in fact sovereign over all the earth.

Another lesson that Jacob needed to learn: he had done nothing to earn God's favor, and it was by God's grace that He even spoke to Jacob. Amazingly, there was no reproof or scolding for the selfish and heartless actions that Jacob had done to his brother and father. In a way, the Lord was asking Jacob: will I be your God, the way I was the God of Abraham and Isaac? Up to this point, Jacob had been scheming to achieve blessings: now, the Lord himself was offering these blessings to him. However, the emphasis shifts. The blessings that Jacob would receive were meant to bless the world.

Moses' listeners/readers needed to hear this lesson. They needed to know that no matter where they were, God was with them. They needed to know that the purpose of God's commitment to them (as his people) was so that they could bless the world. For the Jewish people in exile, who heard the story again much later in time, they also would remember that they were not alone, and that there was a purpose to their lives and faithfulness.

We still need these reassurances today.

Genesis Chapter 28 – Application Questions

1. Even after all that had happened in their family, Isaac still trusted Rebekah. Do you think he was gullible, or was he a person who believed the best of others? What can we learn from his example?
2. Jacob used what can be called the “geographical solution” to his problems with Esau; that is, he changed his location to get away from the problem. Sometimes people do this with churches, too. When should we leave a church (or work place) that is difficult, and when should we stay?
3. Jacob’s promise to God seems to have been a “you scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours”; IF God took care of him, THEN when Jacob rejoined his family he would commit himself to the Lord. Looking past the revelation that Jacob seemed to have no existing relationship with the Lord, what is wrong with this kind of relationship with God?

54 Genesis Chapter 29 – Scripture Questions

1. What was the clue to Jacob that his travels had taken him to the correct place? (vs. 2, 4)
2. Why were the flocks not being watered? (vs. 7, 8)
3. Who showed up with the final flock of sheep? (vs. 9)
4. How did Jacob react to Rachel's arrival? (vs. 10-12)
5. Why did Jacob agree to work for seven years for Laban? (vs. 17-20)
6. When Laban finally held the marriage feast for Jacob, what trick did he pull? (vs. 22-24)
7. What did Jacob agree to do, in exchange for being given Rachel as his second wife? (vs. 27-30)
8. When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, how did he bless her? (vs. 31)
9. How many sons did Leah have, and what was her hope? (vs. 32-35)

Genesis Chapter 29 – What Did It Mean to Them?

For the first time in his life, Jacob finds himself in an inferior position. He shows up at Laban's home with (we assume) only the clothes on his back and his family name. He wants to marry into Laban's family, but he doesn't have the bride price. Laban sees an opportunity to get years of work out of Jacob. We can imagine how shocked and surprised Jacob is when he ends up with Leah instead of Rachel, but it seems an appropriate punishment for the man who cheated his brother out of a reward. Just as Jacob had pretended to be Esau to trick his father, Leah tricks Jacob by pretending to be Rachel. Jacob did marry Rachel a week later, of course, and he started a baby boom when the women and their handmaids began a child-bearing contest. It makes you wonder why Jacob seemed to be so irresistible!

In biblical times, wedding celebrations typically lasted a week. There was a great deal of eating and drinking, and given how Laban tricked Jacob, it seems that the drinking had an effect on Jacob. The substitution of Leah for Rachel is especially ironic since Jacob had substituted himself for Esau in order to trick Isaac. And once Jacob had consummated the marriage there was no going back, just as there was no going back after the family promise was given to Jacob instead of Esau.

There are similarities between Jacob's journey and that of Moses. Moses grew up as a prince and thought he was the master of his own faith. He had to run into the wilderness of Sinai to escape trouble after killing an Egyptian. The Lord cared for him, guided him to Jethro and his family. Moses found refuge, a wife, and a shepherd's vocation for forty years. He also learned humility. No doubt as Moses related the story of Jacob, he was aware of God's providence in their similar situations.

The scribes and historians who gathered and safeguarded Moses' writings many years later could also use these two stories—of Jacob and Moses—as a way to encourage the Israelites living in exile. They needed to know that after their failures as God's people there was still hope. God was still with them, and would guide them through their 'wilderness' of exile into the 'promised land' of his eternal presence. This is still the gift to us from these stories: no matter the 'wilderness' of our lives, God is with us, leading and protecting. Our promised land—heaven—is there waiting for us.

56 Genesis Chapter 29 – Application Questions

1. Jacob knew his eventual destination—Haran, and Laban—and he seems to have known the general direction—east—and he was fairly sure that he had arrived because of the sheep and the well. As a congregation of believers, should we have specific goals, or should we focus more on the general activities of our congregation? How will we know when we “arrive” at the proper place?
2. Jacob seems to have met his match in Laban. No doubt Laban remembered how much money was in Jacob’s family: but still, he hedged his bets about marrying his daughters into Abraham’s line. Why do you think God allowed this kind of behavior among his people? Why does he still allow us to make decisions based on our own desires?
3. We know now that all those sons of Leah would be part of the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise to Abraham. Leah, of course, didn’t know anything about that promise. We like to believe that our congregation is part of God’s plan for the world now. In a way, this makes us a tool in the hand of God. How do you feel about this? Does it make our work for him more meaningful when we can’t really see the end purpose?

57 Genesis Chapter 31 – Scripture Questions

1. Why did Jacob decide to go back to the land of his family? (vs. 1-3)
2. Who does Jacob credit for his financial success? (vs. 5-9)
3. Jacob hasn't entirely changed: what complaint does he have about Laban? (vs. 6, 7)
4. What command does the Lord give to Jacob? (vs. 13)
5. How do Rachel and Leah talk about their father? What do they want Jacob to do? (vs. 14-16)
6. What is the last thing Rachel does before their hurried departure? (vs. 19)
7. It was three days before Laban knew Jacob was gone, and then he chased them for a week. How did God intervene? (vs. 24)
8. How did Laban spin the story to make it seem he wasn't REALLY angry? (vs. 27-30)
9. After Laban looked (but did not find) his household gods/idols, what did Jacob say? (vs. 36-42)
10. Though Laban still blustered that everything (people and animals) was his, he made an agreement with Jacob. What was this agreement? (vs. 51-53)

58 Genesis Chapter 31 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Chapter 30 gives us two things: a list of all the children born to Leah, her maid Zilpah, Rachel's maid Bilhah, and Rachel herself. Leah eventually gives birth to six sons and one daughter; Zilpah has two boys; Bilhah has two boys, and Rachel has Joseph. (Benjamin, Rachel's second son, will be born later.) The listing of these boys is important in Moses' retelling of the story because these are the names of the tribes/clans that he is leading.

The second part of the chapter tells about Jacob's success in sheep and goat herding. He wanted to leave and go back to his father's land, but Laban persuaded him to stay. Jacob works out an agreement: he will take any sheep or goat that is speckled, spotted, or dark—Laban gets all the white ones. Laban, of course, tries to game the system by removing all the male and female goats that had markings and all the dark lambs. Laban hasn't counted on the Lord watching out for Jacob, and over time Jacob's flocks grew larger and stronger. The lesson for Moses' hearers was that no matter the circumstances, the Lord would prosper his people and make them stronger.

Chapter 31 marks the time when the Lord sends Jacob back to his family. It is now 20 years after his arrival, and he is a prosperous man, with wives and children, flocks and servants. By any measure, he is successful. It also seems that he has finally learned to listen to the Lord. True, there is still a large part of him that is self-serving, but he accepts his wealth and success as evidence that the Lord has blessed him. It is significant that he accepts the power of Yahweh in this foreign place, especially since people at this time generally believed that deities were restricted to specific locales. The idea that Yahweh had power here, far away from Israel, meant that the Lord was very powerful indeed. Laban acknowledges this when he accepts the Lord's vision to him. Moses' listeners needed to hear that their Lord and King had power no matter where they wandered. The Jewish people in exile, much later, needed to know that they were not forgotten by God, that he was with them wherever they were.

The episode with Rachel and her household gods is odd. It may be that Rachel did not consider Jacob's God to be hers, and so she did not want to go into strange lands without the comfort of her old beliefs. It is likely that many of Moses' followers had brought along small idols from Egypt, and he may well have wanted to remind them that these objects had no power in the face of their Lord.

59 Genesis Chapter 31 – Application Questions

1. Wow: this family, right? They wouldn't be out of place on Jerry Springer. How much loyalty do we owe family? We all know people who have cut family members out of their lives. How do we square this with Jesus' command to forgive "seventy times seven"?
2. In a sense, Laban was not only Jacob's father-in-law, he was also his employer. Jacob made him rich—but along the way he made himself richer. In Colossians 3:23 (NET), Paul says "Whatever you are doing, work at it with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not for people". What kind of a relationship do you think we should have with employers? Does it make any difference if they are BAD employers?
3. It seems that (after 20 years) Jacob was finally learning to trust the Lord. This kind of growth by baby steps is very human. Can you think of the ways that your spiritual growth happens? What causes you to get better at trusting God?

60 Genesis Chapter 32 – Scripture Questions

1. As Jacob re-entered the land he had run from 20 years before, who did he meet? (vs. 1)
2. What message did Jacob send ahead to his brother Esau? (vs. 4, 5)
3. When he heard that Esau was coming with 400 men, what did he do to protect his people? (vs. 7, 8)
4. What prayer did Jacob lift up to the Lord? (vs. 9-12)
5. How did Jacob plan to gain Esau's favor? (vs. 13-15)
6. What were Jacob's servants leading the gift herds told to say to Esau? (vs. 18)
7. How did Jacob protect his wives and children? (vs. 22, 23)
8. During the night, while he was alone, what happened to Jacob? (vs. 24-28)
9. After Jacob's name was changed, why did he name the place Peniel? (vs. 30)
10. Why did the author remind Israelites to not eat the sinew attached to the socket of the hip? (vs. 32)

61 Genesis Chapter 32 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Jacob's meeting with angels is a bookend to his first journey, when he fled Canaan. He is pleased to see them, calling the place "Mahanaim" which means "two camps". The idea is that God's host (one camp) gave evidence that there would be heavenly protection for Jacob and his entourage (second camp). This gave Jacob encouragement as he went to meet Esau in what had the potential to be a dangerous situation.

Jacob wants, very much, to appease Esau. After his success with Laban, he has no need of anything left by Isaac. Esau, for his part, has no real idea what Jacob has in mind: from Deuteronomy we learn that Esau had taken over land belonging to the Horites, and he had a standing private army of 400—larger than the army used by Abraham in his battle in the Jordan valley.

After all this time, Jacob finally humbles himself before God, admitting that he is unworthy of the lovingkindness and faithfulness that God had shown him. He is willing to submit to Esau (though he does remind God of their covenant!). He is willing to make amends, though—Jacob being Jacob—he works out a way to hedge his bets. The enormous quantity of animals (550) was more than most towns would own in total. It was a kingly gift to Esau...and it showed how wealthy Jacob had become.

The text doesn't tell us why Jacob stayed by himself on the opposite side of the river Jabbok. It might have been duty, or fear, or a need to think alone; he might have wanted time alone with God. Whatever his reason, it had the effect of leaving him with God alone: no excuses, guile, possessions, or any form of protection. From the Lord's perspective, Jacob's struggle (acted out physically) was actually against himself. The angel apparently chose to fight as a human, perhaps as a way to point out that Jacob was fighting himself. Even the 'touch' that disabled him was important, because it showed that to be successful with God meant that he had to be crippled in his own self-sufficiency.

When the match was over, the angel informed him that his name would no longer be Jacob ('one who takes by the heel') but Israel ('he struggles with God'). It is a paradox: only when Jacob was willing to submit to God and allow him to be first in his life was he able to prevail over his circumstances. The name change came with God's blessing on Jacob and his descendants.

62 Genesis Chapter 32 – Application Questions

1. The last verse of this chapter is in the form of a reminder to the readers, the reason ‘why’ they have a certain dietary restriction. What are some of the traditions of our congregation, and why do they exist?
2. Reading Jacob’s prayer makes it clear how he had matured. He was now much more ready to be a leader. How can we know when someone in our church is mature enough to be a leader? What characteristics can we look for?
3. The idea of struggling, or wrestling, with God seems odd. What do you learn about God in this part of the story? Is this comforting or challenging to you?

63 Genesis Chapter 37 – Scripture Questions

1. How old was Joseph when he was out working with some of his brothers? What kind of report did he bring back to his father? (vs. 2)
2. How do we know that Israel loved Joseph the most of his sons? How did the other boys take this favoritism? (vs. 3, 4)
3. What was the first dream that Joseph told his brothers? How did they take it? (vs. 6-8)
4. What was the second dream that Joseph told to his brothers and father? What was the reaction? (vs. 9-11)
5. Jacob/Israel sent Joseph out to join his brothers who were taking care of sheep. What did they decide to do when they saw him coming? (vs. 18-20)
6. Who kept Joseph alive? What did he plan to do? (vs. 21, 22)
7. After throwing Joseph into the empty cistern, what did the brothers do? (vs. 23-28)
8. How did Reuben react when he found Joseph had been sold into Egypt? (vs. 29-32)
9. Did Jacob fall for the trick? How did Jacob feel about losing his son? (vs. 33-35)
10. To whom was Joseph sold? (vs. 36)

64 Genesis Chapter 37 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Chapter 33: Jacob meets Esau. Jacob meets Esau with humility, giving him the honor and respect previously withheld from Esau. Jacob set up his home in a different place than Esau. He settled in Shechem, in the land of Canaan.

Chapter 34: Jacob's daughter, Dinah, was raped by a local man. This man, named Shechem, fell in love with Dinah and wanted to marry her. He sold the idea to his father by saying that the two peoples could intermarry, which would enrich them. Dinah's brothers were outraged. In a trick worthy of Jacob as a young man, they demanded that Shechem and all the other Canaanite men be circumcised. While they were recovering, the brothers stormed the city and killed them all. Jacob was horrified, but it was too late.

Chapter 35: God has Jacob move his family to Bethel. They get rid of all foreign gods and dedicate themselves only to the Lord. Rachel delivered Benjamin and then died. Reuben, the oldest son who was probably around 30 years old by this time, slept with Bilhah (one of Jacob's concubines). Isaac dies at 180 years old, and Esau and Jacob buried him.

Chapter 36: Esau's descendents are listed, and we learn that he was also known as Edom. He had five sons and many grandsons. They were wealthy and influential, with many settlements in the land they possessed.

In contrast to Esau/Edom's settled life, Jacob and his family stayed on the move. They had no permanent home, no kings as did Esau's children. This would have been encouraging to Moses' audience, who were also wanderers. They would have seen God's care for Jacob and known that God would care for them, also.

It is possible to see Joseph as a tattletale. It is also possible to see him as being faithful to his father, telling him unpleasant and difficult things even when it would bring him trouble. He had to know that his brothers disliked him (Jacob's favoritism did him no favors) but spoke truthfully to Jacob even knowing that it would cause him more trouble. Jacob must have known that favoritism was going to cause trouble—he had his own family of origin for proof of that!—but his love of Rachel and her son made him overlook these problems.

It is ironic that Joseph was sold to Ismaelites: these were distant cousins, the children of grandfather Abraham's first son, Ishmael. Joseph ended up in Egypt, which helps Moses' readers know how they ended up in Egypt.

65 Genesis Chapter 37 – Application Questions

1. Dreams were accepted, in ancient times, as valid ways to hear from God. What do you think about this? Should we pay more attention to our dreams?
2. While all twelve sons were equally accepted as sons of Jacob, there seemed to be a hierarchy between sons of wives and sons of concubines. Thinking of the different ministries of our church, do some ministries have more 'status' than others? What kind of problems does that cause?
3. Moses is telling his followers about their history, to help them understand where they are, and why they are there. Do you know your own family history? If so, how does it affect the way you understand yourself?

66 Genesis Chapter 39 – Scripture Questions

1. Who purchased Joseph from the Ishmaelites? (vs. 1)
2. How did Joseph fare in Potiphar's household? (vs. 2-4)
3. After seeing what a good job Joseph did running the household, what did Potiphar do? (vs. 6)
4. Evidently Joseph was a very good-looking man: what did his master's wife want from him? (vs. 7)
5. When Joseph refused her, what did she do? (vs. 13-18)
6. How did Potiphar react to this accusation? (vs. 19, 20)
7. What was the result of the Lord's kindness to Joseph? (vs. 21)
8. What new responsibility was given to Joseph? (vs. 22, 23)
9. How was Joseph's effect on his responsibilities described? (vs. 23)

67 Genesis Chapter 39 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Chapter 37: This interlude covers a time period of about 25 years. It isn't flattering at all to Judah, one of the sons of Jacob. Judah leaves his brothers and moves in with a man named Hirah, who was a man in the Canaanite town of Adullam. While living there, Judah married a Canaanite woman and had three sons. Evidently the first son was an awful person: the text just says the Lord killed him. The second son (Onan) wasn't much better, because he failed to sire a son with his brother's widow—so the Lord killed him, too. Judah decided to wait until the third son was an adult before sending him to the widow (Tamar) to sleep with her and bring about the desired offspring. Until that happened, Tamar was sent back to her family. Eventually Tamar had enough of waiting and she tricked Judah into sleeping with her. He thought she was a prostitute and left identifiable items with her to prove he was planning to pay for her services. When Tamar ends up pregnant, Judah gets very righteous and wants to have her killed. After Tamar proves that it was he (Judah) who made her pregnant, he acknowledges that she was more righteous than him. Tamar gives birth to twins. There are several points made by this story, which Moses' readers would have understood. 1) Marrying outside the tribes never ended well, 2) Following the levirate system of guaranteeing heirs was approved by the Lord, 3) You can't trick the Lord, 4) If the Lord says one group will serve another, he means it (the younger twin was born first), and 5) Bad behavior is always punished.

We know from Genesis 41:46 that he was 30 years old when he began serving Pharaoh. Working backwards, we can figure that he spent about 13 years serving Potiphar and in jail. Joseph's sojourn in Egypt, like that of his father, Jacob, has resulted in an initial fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you". This is not actually a story of the success of Joseph; rather, it is a story of God's faithfulness to his promises.

The story about Joseph and Potiphar's wife reverses a plot from former narratives. Before, the beautiful wife was wanted by the foreign ruler, now it is Joseph who is sought. In the earlier stories, either the Lord or the foreign ruler rescued the wife, but here it is Joseph's own moral courage that saves him. Before we learned about God's faithfulness to keep his covenant; here, the story focuses on the human responsibility. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob may have had faith in God but they often fell short of living up to his expectations. Joseph is different. He has both trust and obedience toward the will of God, and everyone prospers because of his life.

68 Genesis Chapter 39 – Application Questions

1. It seems that everything Joseph was responsible for turned out great! Have you ever known someone who seemed ‘golden’—that everything they did turned out well? Should we see success (at least in church) as evidence of God’s approval and empowerment?
2. The Lord might have been protecting Joseph, but he had a lot of awful things happen to him. He was sold by his brothers, purchased as a slave, lived with sexual harassment, falsely accused of rape, and unjustly imprisoned. So what does it mean to have God’s favor, or to be shown God’s kindness, if this kind of dreadful thing can happen?
3. The Israelites who were hearing these stories of Joseph needed to know their history, and needed to know that their current circumstances were not necessarily representative of God’s concern and care for them. Looking at our current circumstances (either in congregation, city or country), where can you see the hand of God? How concerned do you think God is about the circumstances in which we find ourselves?

69 Genesis Chapter 40 – Scripture Questions

1. Who were the two officials who were imprisoned because they offended Pharaoh? (vs. 1)
2. Where were they imprisoned? Who was placed in charge of these two new prisoners? (vs. 3, 4)
3. What happened one night to the cupbearer and the baker? (vs. 5)
4. How did Joseph respond to the news of their dreams? (vs. 8)
5. What was the cupbearer's dream? (vs. 9-11)
6. How did Joseph interpret this dream? What did he want in exchange for his interpretation? (vs. 12-14)
7. What was the chief baker's dream? (vs. 16, 17)
8. How did Joseph interpret this dream? Did he ask for anything in exchange? (vs. 18, 19)
9. What happened three days later? (vs. 20-22)
10. Did the chief cupbearer remember Joseph, as requested? (vs. 23)

70 Genesis Chapter 40 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Dreams made pagan people nervous; they believed their gods used dreams to warn them of future situations which would soon arise. However, since such dreams involved complex symbolism and each dream had its own interpretation, the dreamers were often confused by the meanings of their dreams. In the ancient Near East, there was an entire discipline of interpreting dreams. There were even manuals written on the subject! Kings usually had among their advisers a variety of specialists, magicians, sorcerers, etc., and among these would have been dream interpreters. Since the cupbearer and chief baker were now prisoners, they had no access to these people for insight into their dreams. Joseph's offer, then, was a sharp contrast. He was a lowly prisoner, a foreign slave, and he was saying that the ability to interpret dreams wasn't a human art or skill but a gift from God. He offered them truth.

As Moses' listeners/readers heard this story, they would have undoubtedly been remembering their time in Egypt. It was assumed by the common people—including slaves—that the Pharaoh and his court had access to the gods, including direction by these gods for the future. Joseph's status as a slave, and his insistence that only God had this power, would have been deeply resonant with them. They would have remembered how this God had freed them, and that he alone knew their future. Joseph's words would remind them that their fate was in the hands of one who gave gifts to his people and ordered the future to fulfill his plans.

To look further out, the exiles in Babylon and Assyria who heard these stories anew from the scribes and teachers who compiled them would also have been comforted. Like Joseph, they were foreigners in a strange land, their circumstances controlled by people who did not know or follow the Lord. Like Joseph, they needed to do their best to live faithful lives in spite of difficulties. Like Joseph, they could choose to believe that the God who loved them would help them understand their situation and live accordingly. Their fate was in God's hands.

This is still our situation today. We may be imprisoned by our circumstances. The responsibility we have before us is to trust that God loves us and expects us to be faithful to him. The outcome of our lives is in his hands.

71 Genesis Chapter 40 – Application Questions

1. Even in the middle of hard times, Joseph showed his faith in God, but he was still disappointed and continued to suffer imprisonment. We ALL know faithful people who suffer. We have ALL prayed for relief from something hard—and not been relieved. What are we supposed to do in the face of unrelenting hardship?
2. Joseph's connection to God (through the ability to interpret dreams) seems like a mixed blessing. If you could have prophetic dreams, would you want them? Why or why not?
3. Moses' followers probably enjoyed hearing stories that showed Egyptians in a subordinate position. In our world, what kind of stories resonate with us? Where do we hear these stories?

72 Genesis Chapter 41 – Scripture Questions

1. How long after the cupbearer was restored until the Pharaoh had his first dream? (vs. 1)
2. What odd thing happened to the cows in Pharaoh's first dream? (vs. 4)
3. In the second dream, what happened to the grain? (vs. 7)
4. What did Pharaoh do after the cupbearer told his story? (vs. 14)
5. Who did Joseph credit with his ability to interpret dreams? (vs. 16)
6. How did Joseph interpret Pharaoh's dreams? (vs. 29-31)
7. What was Joseph's recommendation to Pharaoh about dealing with the message from the Lord? (vs. 33-36)
8. Why did Pharaoh choose Joseph to execute the plan? (vs. 39, 40)
9. What were the names of Joseph's two sons born before the famine began? (vs. 51, 52)
10. When the famine began, who was able to benefit from Joseph's oversight? (vs. 56, 57)

Genesis Chapter 41 – What Did It Mean to Them?

The story of Joseph and his appointment over the Egyptian kingdom is, in a way, a story of what Adam was intended to be. Adam was dependent on God for the knowledge of good and evil; so was Joseph, except that Joseph recognized his dependence on God. Adam was meant to be God's representative over the land; Joseph became Pharaoh's representative, with the signet ring and royal garments. God provided a wife for Adam; the king gave Joseph his wife. Joseph appears to be put forward as the ideal of what a truly wise and faithful man is like. He does, in fact, accomplish everything that Adam failed to accomplish. Joseph's story is also a vision for Moses' followers to teach them what is possible if they trust in God and obey his commands.

Famines were common in the ancient world, and there are many historical records of famines and the destruction that they caused. In the 13th century BC, nearly all of the Eastern Mediterranean civilizations collapsed because of a prolonged drought. We need to remember that to ancient peoples there was no such thing as nature the way we understand it today. If things were good, it was because the god was happy. If things were going badly, it was because the deity was angry. For a national catastrophe like famine, the sin was either with the entire people, or with the monarchs who represented them. It was the job for the prophets and seers to figure out why the god was angry.

This helps us understand why Pharaoh took the dreams and their interpretation so seriously. Dreams were known to be a way that the gods communicated with their followers. Pharaoh, and his advisors, knew that the way the upcoming disaster was handled could possibly make the difference between the fall of their country (or at least their power) and its survival. It is significant that Pharaoh's dreams began at the Nile. This great river was so important to the country that it was considered a deity in its own right. Joseph's interpretation, and his plans, were seen as a gift from the gods to preserve the country of Egypt (and, not incidentally, the power of Pharaoh and his supporters).

This blessing on Egypt was a result of Joseph's obedience and trust in the Lord, and could easily be understood by Moses' followers as a consequence of the blessing on Abraham. God promised Abraham that he would be a blessing to the nations, and the Israelites could see Joseph's effect on Egypt. Of course, God's primary purpose was to preserve and protect Jacob's family, but the secondary effect of preserving Egypt was massive.

74 Genesis Chapter 41 – Application Questions

1. There are millions of people going hungry in our world, caused by military actions, climate problems, and political policies. Joseph had a God-given plan to protect Egypt—any though he didn't know it at the time, his own family. Is there anything we should be doing to cope with this problem, or is it just something that happens?
2. Pharaoh and his court had culturally-based reasons for accepting Joseph's interpretation and plans. What sort of warnings, if any, does God send us now?
3. Some people believe that God has specific plans for individual people's lives. Others believe that we have a general guide for how to live, and that within that guide we are free to make our own choices. What do you think? How does your belief in 'the hand of God' affect your daily choices?

75 Genesis Chapter 42 – Scripture Questions

1. After Jacob learned that Egypt had grain for sale, what did he tell his sons? (vs. 2)
2. Who went to buy the grain? (vs. 3-5)
3. How was one of Joseph's original dreams fulfilled? (vs. 6)
4. Even though Joseph recognized his brothers, he accused them of being _____. (vs. 9)
5. What did Joseph demand of his brothers, in order to prove their innocence? (vs. 19, 20)
6. What did the brothers recognize as the source of their current distress? (vs. 21, 22)
7. How did Joseph create more confusion for his brothers? (vs. 25-28)
8. While the sons were telling Jacob the story of their experience in Egypt, what did Jacob see? (vs. 35)
9. What did Reuben offer to Jacob as surety for Simeon's return? (vs. 37)
10. How did Jacob react to the demand to take Benjamin to Egypt? (vs. 38)

Genesis Chapter 42 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Throughout history, God has used both good and bad situations in life to prepare people to fulfill his plans. It was not by accident that Joseph had so much authority granted to him; God put him in charge of providing grain for the hungry people in Egypt as well as for all those who came from the surrounding countries. Nobody realized that God was working toward moving Jacob's entire family to Egypt. As Moses' followers well knew, this resulted in a 400-year stay. After this time the Lord brought them out of bondage and into freedom.

God can use circumstances to remind people of their sins and make them aware of their guilt. Joseph's brothers were reminded of their guilt by a severe famine. The trip to Egypt would have been about 250 miles, and it may seem remarkable that they went directly to Joseph since he undoubtedly had overseers who worked with him. When the brothers saw him, they saw a wealthy, aristocratic Egyptian—which Joseph was! His conversations with them seem harsh, but it was necessary for Joseph to know if they had matured. They did, in fact, remember how they had mistreated Joseph. Reuben, particularly, seemed to believe that their guilt over Joseph had been the direct cause of their current troubles.

God can remind people of their sins in order to give them the opportunity to repent and prove themselves worthy of his calling. Joseph was giving his brothers a chance to not only recognize their sin but to show if they had genuinely changed. It seems likely that Joseph was not simply taking vengeance on his brothers; he was trying to find out if true reconciliation was possible.

Both Moses' readers/listeners and the Hebrews in exile hundreds of years later could take specific lessons from these narratives. 1) God has long-term control over history, 2) Current circumstances can be used as opportunities for soul-searching and repentance, and 3) God wants his people to be in reconciled relationships with him and each other. These are lessons that we, too, can take to heart.

Genesis Chapter 42 – Application Questions

1. Family dysfunction can cause trouble long after actions. Should Joseph have announced himself immediately to his brothers? Where is the burden of beginning reconciliation: with the one who has been offended, or with the one who caused the offense?
2. When family troubles affect the church or local congregation, who should intervene?
3. Choices have consequences, both good and bad. Moses' readers dealt with this reality, and so do we. Can you think of a choice that had bad consequences for our congregation? What about good consequences? In general, do our congregational processes for making choices bring us good or bad consequences?

Genesis Chapter 43 – Scripture Questions

1. Why did Jacob want to send his sons back to Egypt: because of the famine, or because Simeon was still there in prison? (vs. 1, 2)
2. Judah reminded them that they could not go back unless _____ came with them. (vs. 3-5)
3. What argument did Judah present to Jacob? (vs. 8-10)
4. When the brothers returned to Egypt, what (and who) did they take with them? (vs. 15)
5. How did Joseph react when he saw Benjamin? (vs. 16, 17)
6. After the brothers were brought to Joseph's house, they were certain they were in trouble. How did Joseph's servant in charge of his household reassure them? (vs. 23)
7. When the meal began, what did Joseph ask the brothers? What did they do, in fulfillment of Joseph's dream? (vs. 27, 28)
8. How did Joseph react to seeing Benjamin? (vs. 30, 31)
9. Why were the brothers astonished by their seating arrangement? (vs. 33)
10. What did the brothers do after they became relaxed with Joseph, in spite of his obvious favoritism toward Benjamin? (vs. 34)

79 Genesis Chapter 43 – What Did It Mean to Them?

You may wonder why Judah, rather than Reuben, was taking the lead in the family. There were a few reasons why Jacob had lost confidence in Reuben: 1) Reuben had committed incest with Bilhah, his stepmother (35:22); 2) He had been unable, long earlier, to keep Joseph safe (37:29-35); he had returned from Egypt without Simeon (42:24, 36). Simeon was next in line as the second son, but of course he was in prison in Egypt. Levi, the third son, wasn't a good candidate for leadership because he had been Simeon's partner in the treacherous deeds against Shechem (34:25-30). This left Judah as the eldest son in good standing with his father.

It's a little odd that Judah calls Benjamin a 'lad', since he was at least 32—certainly an adult. Perhaps Judah was using it as an affectionate term, since Benjamin was much younger than he was. And no doubt in Judah's eyes his youngest brother would always be a boy. Judah gives Jacob his pledge that Benjamin would be safe. (Interestingly, the word "pledge" is the same word describing Judah's promise to Tamar to pay her for having sex with him.) We don't have any idea what Benjamin thought about all this—he never speaks in this narrative.

The seating arrangement sounds unusual to us. Joseph ate by himself, the Egyptians ate separately, and the brothers were at still another place. Ordinary Egyptians could not eat with high officials, and all Egyptians had to be segregated from foreigners. This would not have seemed strange to the brothers, but they WERE surprised to be seated in chronological order. They would have also been surprised to receive food from Joseph's own table!

This chapter helps us see the way that God can use life situations to guide people toward him. The famine drove Jacob's sons to Egypt, toward their eventual move to that country. We can also learn that God can use burdens to change hearts. Before this story, we had learned that Judah was as much of a scoundrel as Jacob had been. Now we see that he is a changed man. Jacob, also, seems to be changed: his faith offered no guarantee of success, but there was no other way to save his family from the famine. Now, he was helpless, and could only cast himself and his family on the mercy and compassion of God.

Genesis Chapter 43 – Application Questions

1. Jacob had a hard decision to make, whether or not to risk Benjamin's life against the needs of the family at large. How do we, as a church, make risky decisions? What do you think makes a decision risky?
2. It is possible that Moses included the aside about Egyptian disgust about eating with Hebrews as a reminder to his listeners about the treatment they had received as 'lower class' before their salvation by the Lord. Racism seems to be a long-established response to 'others', which is one reason this statement from Paul is so radical: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female—for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). How can we guard ourselves against this kind of instinctual racism?
3. Eating together is used, all throughout the Bible, as a way of confirming covenants and treaties. Is there a way we could use meals in our congregation to bring us closer to one another? Is there a way our class could do this?

81 Genesis Chapter 44/45 – Scripture Questions

1. What did Joseph have hidden in Benjamin's grain sack? (44:2)
2. How did the brothers protest against the accusation of thievery? (44:7-9)
3. When the silver cup was found in Benjamin's sack, what did the brothers do? (44:13)
4. What did Joseph propose as a solution to the situation he created? (44:16, 17)
5. How did Judah respond to Joseph's sentence? (44:33)
6. What did Joseph do after Judah's offer? (45:1-4)
7. According to Joseph, who arranged for him to be in Egypt, and why was this done? (45:7, 8)
8. How did the brothers react to this news? (45:14, 15)
9. When Pharaoh heard the news about Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers, what did he do? (45:17-20)
10. How did Jacob react upon hearing the news of Joseph? (45:26-28)

82 Genesis Chapter 44/45 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Joseph's actions may seem cruel, but the intent was to uncover the true character of his brothers. In his explanation to them (after he reveals his true identity), we see the central theme of this narrative: though the brothers were responsible for Joseph's being sold into Egypt, and though they intended 'harm' to him, God was ultimately behind it all and had worked it out for the 'good'. Joseph saw God's desire to accomplish a great deliverance of Jacob's family.

Hearing these narratives, Moses' listeners undoubtedly saw themselves and their relationship to the God who had saved them. All their struggles (and failures!) were a way of testing and training their faithfulness to the Lord. Even the greatest punishment—wandering 40 years until those who feared entering Canaan died—was a pruning and training period. They were learning to be a people devoted to God, trusting him for their salvation. No question but this was a harsh test!

If we look further ahead into the history of Israel, the later scribes and historians who compiled these narratives would have found them an important encouragement and teaching tool to the Hebrews living in foreign lands. The people had been carried into captivity after a very long time of disobedience to God and his service. In those foreign lands, it was important that they see and understand the necessity of obedience, trust and commitment to the Lord. Joseph's tests of his brothers (who were definitely guilty) would have been a stark comparison to their own situation. Warned for many years by the prophets about their sin, they were suffering a loss of both their freedom and their lands. Joseph's statement that God desired to bring about a great deliverance to his people would have been both encouraging and a call to righteousness—even in a foreign land.

Genesis Chapter 44/45 – Application Questions

1. When Moses is telling these stories of the testing of the brothers, he may have been suggesting to his listeners that their hardships in the desert were tests from God. Do you think God tests us by our life circumstances, or do bad things just ‘happen’?
2. In the time of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, God seemed to have direct relationships with people. During Moses’ time (and after) the relationship seems to have been with the nation first—then individuals. In general, we believe that we have individual relationships with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. This is true even though a lot of the New Testament is addressed to the church at large rather than individuals. Which do you think is more important, long term: the life of the Church or the lives of individual people?
3. Joseph was thoroughly Egyptian by the time his story is all told. Do you think God didn’t care about the cultural assimilation, or do you think God simply accepted that this assimilation was necessary in order to protect the tiny group of people who followed him? Does our culture make any difference to God?

84 Genesis Chapter 46-50 – Scripture Questions

46:1-7, 26-34

1. When Jacob/Israel began the journey to Egypt, what happened to him in Beer Sheba when he stopped to make sacrifice to the Lord? (46:2-4)
2. Who did Jacob take with him to Egypt? (46:5-7)
3. What kind of reunion did Joseph and his father have? (46:29)

47:5-12, 27-31

4. Where did Pharaoh tell Joseph to settle his family? (47:6)
5. How did Jacob reply to Pharaoh's questions? (47:10)
6. After living in Egypt for 17 years, what was Jacob's last request of Joseph? (47:29)
7. On his deathbed, what promise did Jacob/Israel make to Joseph? (48:21, 22)
8. When the days of mourning had passed, what did Joseph do? Who went along? (50:4-8)
9. What were Joseph's brothers worried about? (50:15-18)
10. How did Joseph reassure his brothers? (50:19-21)
11. What oath did Joseph require of his relatives? (50:25, 26)

Genesis Chapter 46-50 – What Did It Mean to Them?

The backdrop to this final narrative is the famine that was still ravaging the region. Joseph's plans and projects not only saved his family, they saved the Egyptians and everyone who came to them for food. First with his brothers and then with the Egyptians, Joseph's wisdom is seen as the source of life for everyone in the land. More than this, through God's wisdom given to Joseph (descendant of Abraham) the nations are receiving a blessing.

There is an ironic twist to this story that Moses' listeners would not have failed to catch: Joseph's story begins with him being sold into slavery. Now, at the end, Joseph is shown selling the whole of the land of Egypt into slavery. He takes their money, their livestock, their land, and their bodies as payment for saving their lives. In the end of the story, the offspring of Abraham became fruitful and increased greatly in number, living safely and in prosperity in Goshen.

Both Jacob and Joseph requested that they be buried in the land of their people. A central part of the covenant with Abraham was the promise of the land. So, the request of Jacob and Joseph was a trust in the faithfulness of God to keep his word. Both Jacob and Joseph give blessings to the next generation. It is a well-worn theme that these blessings did not necessarily go to the ones who may have expected them: not natural descent or natural right. The blessing was a gift, given to those who could not claim it. This makes clear that God's blessings came from him (or his representatives) and could not be claimed, only recognized with humility.

Behind all the events and human plans that we learn of in the story of Joseph lies the unchanging plan of God. It is the same plan introduced from the very beginning of the book, where God looks at what he has just created for humankind and sees that "it is good" (1:4-31). Through his dealings with the patriarchs and Joseph, God had continued to accomplish his good plan. He was faithful to his purpose.

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Genesis Chapter 46-50 – Application Questions

1. Jacob's family only had about 70 people when they moved to Egypt. Knowing what a large nation they became, how does this make you think about group 'size' when it comes to following the Lord?
2. Faith sometimes requires large changes. Do you think our church has any large changes coming? Is there any way to prepare for these changes?
3. Moses' followers knew that Joseph's bones were traveling with them. These remains were a vivid, physical reminder of their history. What sort of reminders do we have of our congregation's history?