

Genesis: A Chapter-by-Chapter Study

Introduction

The title of this book comes from the Greek word “geneseos” which translated from the Hebrew word “bereshith” means “In beginning.” The Hebrew word is also the first word of this book and the first word of the Bible as a whole. It is an ancient custom to name a document or book after the first word or words of the writing. This word can mean “birth,” “genealogy,” or “history of origin” which is fitting for this book since all three definitions apply to the contents.

Genesis matches other historical records from the Mesopotamian life and culture of its time. Mesopotamia is considered to be the location of the beginning of human history and is often referred to as the “Cradle of Civilization” by archeologists and scholars. Much of the Genesis account coincides with the historical evidence from this period.

Although not directly identified in the book itself, Moses is the leading candidate for authorship of the first five books of the Bible, also called the Pentateuch or Tora. These first five books are the foundation for Jewish law and what Christians call the “Old Covenant.” It is believed that Moses wrote most of the Pentateuch while wandering the desert for 40 years after leading the Jewish slaves out of Egypt.

Moses is credited with writing the first accounts of the Bible, but he is not the source of these writings. The Jews are experts at keeping accurate oral records over many generations, before and after Moses wrote the history on paper. There is also the possibility that major events were recorded in stone that Moses transferred to paper later. The only bottleneck in this history would be Noah (see chapters 6-9) who would have to recount everything prior to the flood for preservation and to be passed to his offspring. The Jewish historian Josephus offers the possibility that Methuselah wrote the pre-flood history on stone obelisks and that these stones were aboard the ark that Noah built, but there is no evidence of this outside of Jewish tradition.

One major consideration to take into account when reading Genesis is that the Jewish law or Mosaic law had not been issued yet. Even the ten commandments had not been heard before the Jews were enslaved in Egypt. There are many scenarios in Genesis which go against Jewish law, but those laws were not in effect yet. Even so, the followers of God knew right from wrong and were to adhere to some unwritten code of conduct. The ancient culture and customs seen in these chapters may seem unlikely or even grotesque by modern standards, but the traditions found here match most historical references, and some have even carried into modern times.

Chapter 1

The first days of creation are some of the most scrutinized and debated scriptures in all of history and the world. Was the earth really created in just a week? Does the fossil record prove the Bible wrong? Can science and the Bible coexist? There are many different viewpoints on this subject from many different schools of thought. A thorough study of the Bible will show how accurate Biblical prophecies are, a corroboration of events from secular history, and a consistently loving God who goes to great lengths to show compassion to His creation. Given the Bible as a whole, it is safe to say that one either believes the Word of God completely or not at all, regardless of one’s interpretation of the passages.

V1-5

There are many different takes on “Day 1” of creation. Some take this as a literal day and that the world is only a few thousand years old. Some take this as a vision given to some early ancestor, maybe even Adam, that didn’t comprehend what he was being shown and translated it as best he could, much like the translations of the vision of the Apostle John’s Revelation. Still another theory is that the heavens and the earth were created at different times prior to “light” being created on what the Bible calls the first day so there is no way of knowing how much time has passed between those three creations. Obviously, there was something that existed before “the beginning” as we know it since God Himself created “the beginning.” Job 38:7 even mentions that angels witnessed this creation so there were a heavenly host before there was our universe.

On the first “day,” there was heaven, earth, and light. However long that took or how much time passed in between the creation of each item is up for interpretation. As for the light itself, see the notes on verses 14-19.

V6-8

What is the separation of water on the second day?

God created an atmosphere that contained water vapor that was above the surface of the newly created earth. At this point, earth is still covered in water and is now surrounded by water vapor. Many speculate that there is no rain yet and that it might not rain until the time of Noah.

V9-13

The third day of creation is the forming of dry land which will not just be rock jutting out of the oceans but fertile ground which will produce vegetation that helps produce oxygen. The animal kingdom and vegetation have a symbiotic relationship as plants produce oxygen and take in CO₂ and animals produce CO₂ and take in oxygen.

V14-19

What is the light that was created on the first day if the sun and moon weren’t created until the fourth day?

God separated light from darkness on the first day. This does not mean “light” as we know it. Some take this as meaning that God created the light spectrum, all light that we as humans can see and the spectrums that we can’t see. Some even associate the light of “day one” with the “big bang” that sparked the creation of the universe. Still others believe that this first light may be a reference to the supernatural, but that is a very vague reference without much biblical support. Regardless of the limit of our understanding, the sun, moon, and stars aren’t created until day 4, *after* the land appears on the planet.

God created the expanse of the entire night sky on the fourth day. This would also create the orbit of the Earth around the sun and the moon around Earth, creating the seasons on the planet. This verse also indicates the creation of the rest of the solar system, the galaxy, and the universe as we know it. If this is a literal creation timetable, then the Earth is older than the sun! The Bible treats planet Earth and our solar system as the center of creation. Whether this is correct or not remains to be seen but God focused on this planet for the purpose of creating humans in His image.

V20-23

What are the three things that God creates on day 5?

The only planet in our solar system, galaxy, or universe that contains life (that we know of) is Earth. God focused on Earth as His masterpiece. He got creative with this planet. Think of how many kinds of various plants that can be seen: grass, flowers, trees, vines, moss, and fruits and vegetables. Think of how many different kinds there are. Plants were just the beginning. Now God is creating fish and birds. The ocean is filled with various types of sea creatures. Different species are still being discovered! Think of how many birds there are, how many colors, sizes, speeds, and even the different sounds they make. God is making His masterpiece colorful and musical. And...God creates sex! The plants and animals are made to procreate. Humans simply fit into this pre-made mold.

V24-25

This is day 6, part 1. God creates land animals. There is an abundance of creativity and variety in the land animals, and it is estimated that of the three groups (sea, air, and land animals) that the land animals have more species than both fish and birds combined, despite the planet having 2/3 surface area of water. God is letting His creativity flow like the greatest artist in the universe.

V26-31

God creates man last. The entire universe was created for the pleasure of mankind. The land, the seas, the skies, the planets, the stars, and beyond are for the benefit and enjoyment of God and human beings.

Who is the "Us" and "Our" in verse 26?

This is not a mistake. This is the very first reference to the "beings" of God, the trinity of the Father, Son, and Spirit. There are many different takes on what this means exactly, but most believe that humans are unique in creation because we have a soul. This would be the likeness of the Spirit, much like our physical appearance is like that of Jesus. Some compare our likeness to the Father as that of our morality or even holiness which would become tainted during the "fall" in the Garden of Eden (see chapter 3). There are a variety of opinions on what "Our image" means but we need only to look to the New Testament and Jesus to see at least a part of what the human image should be.

Chapter 2

V1-3

What does it mean when it says God "rested?"

God was not tired from hard work. God was admiring His creation much as a painter might sit and admire a painting or musicians put on headphones to isolate music that they are enjoying. God separated Himself from any other work He was doing to enjoy this moment in time of creation.

This also shows how far back the concept of a "week" appears in history. Almost every culture on the planet recognizes the passing of days in 7-day increments.

The observance of a Sabbath, or day of rest, also extends back through the millennia. Colossians 2:16-17 and Galatians 4:9-11 indicate why we as Christians do not observe the Sabbath on Saturday, as is Jewish

custom. Christians still observe a day of rest out of respect for the day of Christ's resurrection and obedience to the Ten Commandments, not out of duty to the Old Covenant.

What is the difference between the seventh day and the previous six days in scripture?

It is interesting to note that every previous day of creation is concluded with the phrase, "There was evening and there was morning..." whereas the day of rest does not conclude. Many take this to mean that God's "rest" is eternal. Not that He isn't working, but that we as believers in God can find rest in our creator, the eternal admiration of the works of God. It could also mean that God is still "resting" and admiring His creation.

V4-7

What is the significance of the words "Lord God" in verse 4?

This is the first time the name Yahweh appears in the Bible. Yahweh is the proper name of God, often seen in the Bible as Yahweh God, Jehovah God, Lord God, or even as just God. As a side note, the English word "Lord" comes from the early Anglo-Saxon word for bread. English nobles would freely provide bread to those in need, earning them the title "dispensers of bread." The words "loaf" and "lord" both stem from the same English origin. The early translators of the English Bible saw fit to give the title "Lord" to God.

This section is a more detailed retelling of the creation, providing further insight to the creative mind of God. Some think that this may be the creation account from the perspective of Adam. The description of man becoming a "living being" is mirrored in Genesis 1 verses 21 and 24. The same term for breathing life into man was also how God breathed life into all the other animals. The difference is that man was created in the image of God.

V8-9

Here is the account of the creation of the Garden of Eden. This account alludes to Eden being created specifically for Adam and Eve. It also tells of the trees of Life and of Good and Evil in the garden.

What is the tree of life?

The tree of life will be mentioned again in Genesis 3:22 but is also referred to in Revelation 2:7 and 22:2. It is unclear here, but some think this to be the eternal life which is granted us by believing and trusting Jesus (John 3:16). Others think that this tree provides human immortality. There is much debate and speculation with no certain answer.

If the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil would cause the fall of man, why plant it in the garden in the first place?

This is another much-debated question with no definite answer. As the artist behind the creation, maybe God knew that the creation needed this particular tree. God knows how everything in creation weaves together and this tree may have served a bigger purpose than what His creation is aware of. Even poisons can be used for healing when treated in the proper way. Whatever the case is, this tree was there. God gave specific instructions concerning this tree and those instructions would be disregarded (chapter 3).

V10-14

The four rivers, Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates are mentioned here. These four rivers fork from a primary source of water which supplied Eden with water. While the Tigris and Euphrates rivers have been around thousands of years and are still easily identifiable today, the Pishon and Gihon rivers are not as easy to identify. In the original Hebrew, the Euphrates River was called “Phrath,” and the Tigris was called “Hiddekel.” There are some that believe that Gihon is the current day Abay River in Ethiopia, but that is up for debate. There is no easily identifiable connection to Pishon from any modern rivers in the region. It is possible that it has long since disappeared due to geographical events including the great flood in chapter 7. It’s probable that the Tigris and Euphrates would be completely different compared to what they are known as today. Many geologists and biblical scholars point to the source of these rivers as either the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea, but these are mostly educated guesses. It is safe to say that the rivers do not resemble their original forms pre-flood and that no one knows the location of Eden or the source of the four rivers.

V15-17

Why did God create man?

Were you ever asked in school the age-old question, “If money were no object, what would you do with your life?” Many people think of “paradise” or even “heaven” as being a place where you don’t have to work. God created man to perform tasks. Working is a part of our “paradise.” It’s what gives us purpose and motivation. But it is not the “work” that we normally think of where we slave away for a paycheck and do monotonous tasks or strenuous physical labor. Work in paradise is rewarding and pleasant. It’s work that we *want* to do. Imagine being able to work on whatever we wanted with no boss or deadlines. We could build, sew, cook, plant, write, sing, draw, design, program, research, or any number of things that your heart desires. God’s work is ideal. We have a heart to do *something*. The world has just watered this down to fit worldly needs and desires.

Back to the question of why the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is in the garden. God presented Adam with an instruction. God also gave Adam the ability to obey or disobey that instruction. God gave Adam free will so that Adam could *choose* God. God doesn’t want robots. God wants relationships. It is also important to realize that God didn’t just tell Adam not to do something and then walk away. God told Adam the consequences of disobedience. “Obey this because...” God doesn’t command us to obey him blindly for no reason. There are always reasons. God just may not always tell us what those reasons are like He did with Adam.

V18-25

This marks the first time that God saw something that was not good in His creation. Man should not be alone.

What does the phrase, “Helper comparable to him” mean in verse 18?

This single verse is a major point of contention concerning the role of women. Some translations choose the phrase “companion” instead of “helper,” but the original Hebrew is most closely translated as “helper.” God is giving authority to man, but this in no way makes woman less than man. The man carries the responsibilities of decision making but must also bear the consequences of bad decisions. Man and woman are meant to work together. As verse 22 will demonstrate, man and woman are more alike than they are different. There is a Jewish tradition stating that God made woman, not out of man’s

foot to be under him, nor out of his head to be over him, but she was taken from under his arm that he might protect her and from next to his heart that he might love her.

Remember how God created sex for the animals? Most animals and many plants were made in both male and female genders for procreation. Man was made as a male in God's image but *without a mate*. There is no female counterpart of God, so man was created alone. It was only *after* man had been created that God saw fit to make woman. The fact that woman was made as the female of her species after the male had been created makes woman unique in all of creation.

The chapter closes with the first union. Man and Woman in perfect splendor with God in the Garden of Eden! Imagine the bliss they must have felt. It is only in retrospect that we as Christians long for that same happiness and perfection in God's glory. This passage sets the standards for a Christian marriage.

Chapter 3

Many consider this to be one of the most important chapters in the Bible, second only to the accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection found in the Gospels. The resurrection is only necessary because of this chapter.

V1-7

Why is the serpent so smart and evil?

Genesis does not identify the serpent as Satan, but later books of the Bible do. Ezekiel 28:13-19, Job 26:13, Isaiah 51:9, and Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 all associate Satan with a serpent or serpent-like creature. The name Satan is never used here, but it is Jewish and Christian tradition based on later books of the Bible that Satan inhabited an animal in the garden of creation. If it is not Satan, then this animal is smart and capable of speech!

It is unclear if this is an indication of how smart the serpent is by design or if this is only how smart it is while being possessed by the devil. Most believe this refers to Satan himself being smart and not just the animal in question. No one has ever accused Satan of stupidity. He is one of the cleverest beings that the world has encountered and certainly cleverer than any human.

What is wrong with Eve's conversation with the serpent?

First, Eve was talking to a serpent! Eve, as she would later be called, is having a conversation with an animal. There is no other mention of animals talking to humans in the Garden of Eden and we are given no reason to believe this would be a common occurrence. Second, she misquotes God in her reply. There is much debate about whether Eve even knew the name of the tree, let alone knew the proper commandment concerning it. Whether it is ignorance, resentment, or some other reason for her misquoting God, she continued a conversation, presumably with Satan, that could only lead to questioning the motives and intentions of God. Satan doesn't make us do anything. But he is extremely effective at temptation.

Satan essentially told a white lie to Eve. It was not an immediate death, as in ceasing to live, which we would experience. It would be a slow death by our own choices which would be our downfall. This fruit apparently looked good and tasted good, but it was tainted. The "wisdom" which was acquired from the fruit poisoned our minds. Adam and Eve had never known evil. They had no idea the corruption that

could occur in their own thoughts. When that “wisdom” overwhelmed them, they had reason to be afraid.

How did Adam fall?

Only half of verse 6 is dedicated to Adam succumbing to the temptation. It does not say if he was persuaded, if he rebuked Eve at first and later decided to partake, if he unknowingly ate of the fruit, or if he just decided that if it was good enough for Eve, it was good enough for him. There is no mention of how quickly Adam gave in or even how he gave in.

They were not only aware of good and evil, but now they were aware of their own nakedness. There are some different takes on what this means. One of the more interesting concepts is that Adam and Eve, made in the image of God, were clothed in “light,” much like God is portrayed throughout the Bible. This fruit removed that light. Other ideas on this matter point out that without the evil of lusting or adultery that nakedness would not be an issue. Once Adam and Eve were awakened to the sinful possibilities, they realized that they must cover themselves.

Why use fig leaves to cover themselves?

Modern day Fig leaves can be up to 10 inches long and 5 inches wide. Because of their shape, it is possible that the leaves would be easy to intertwine with each other to create a fairly decent covering, something which Adam and Eve had never done before. The problem with these leaves is that they are fuzzy or even bristly and can cause minor skin irritations. Whether the modern fig is the same as the fig found in the Garden of Eden is not known.

V8-9

Verse 8 presents a sharp contrast to the dreadful sin that Adam and Eve have just become aware of. God is walking in the garden in the cool of the day. This is a peaceful and pleasant presentation of the relationship between God and humans. Because of sin, this relationship has now become harder to attain.

There are many that speculate that this physical form is God the Son, Jesus, that is walking among Adam and Eve. Others think that this was the only time mankind was pure enough to see God and that Adam and Eve are the only humans to ever see the Father in all His glory. Genesis is unclear on which, if either, theory is accurate.

The Bible doesn’t record the tone used when God asks, “Where are you?” but it is certain that God knew exactly where they were and what had happened.

V10-13

What does the conversation between Adam and God remind you of?

This resembles the back-and-forth between a parent and a child caught red-handed. Adam is scrambling to answer God, knowing that there is no good answer. Adam even shifts the blame to someone else much like a young child would do. He is at least honest enough to admit that he did eat the fruit.

God confronts their sin directly by asking them if they ate the forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve tried to hide their nakedness, but their nudity was not the problem. Covering themselves with fig leaves is like

putting a bandage on the thumb of a severed arm. There is a much bigger problem to be addressed and Adam and Eve were too ashamed to admit it.

What is Eve's response to God?

Eve is much more direct and honest with God. She readily admits that she ate the fruit. She tells God she was deceived, but this is not shifting the blame. It is the truth. Her own shame keeps her answer simple and direct.

V14-15

Why curse the serpent if it really was Satan that performed the deception?

There is speculation that the serpent prior to being cursed was a magnificent, splendid animal. Some even ponder if this is what fictional dragons are based upon. That Satan would use such a creature to bring deception into this new world is unthinkable. It is still unclear why God cursed this species of animal, but there is a prophecy to be found here, the first prophecy in all the Bible. It is not a prophecy given to man to proclaim, but a foreshadowing of what God is doing and what He will do. There are some schools of thought that believe that God did not curse any animal at all, but cursed Satan directly which lends even more weight to the prophecy.

God cursed the serpent to be lower than all the other animals by forcing it to crawl with its belly always on the ground. This represents the lowliness of Satan who always seeks victory over God but can never attain it. This curse could be cursing Satan to be *like* the serpent, and he will always be a lowly creature, or it could be cursing the animal directly which would mean that snakes at some point early in creation had legs.

There will be enmity not only between the woman and the snake, but between the seed of the snake (this represents the kingdom of Satan on earth) and the seed of the woman. Notice that the seed of man is not mentioned. Many point to this verse as the first mention of a future virgin birth and that Satan will bruise the Seed's heel (the crucifixion) but that the Seed will ultimately crush the snake's head (defeat Satan with the resurrection). Verse 3:15 has even been referred to as "the First Gospel" since this is such an obvious proclamation of the coming victorious Christ.

V16

This curse upon woman is used to explain woman's lowly position in almost all cultures throughout history. Their "sorrow" is always being under the control of man. Many men misuse this verse as a declaration of authority to rule over women. Even in the modern world, many cultures and countries treat women as second-class citizens. It would be Christ and His treatment of women as equals that would teach the church to treat women with dignity and respect. There are various levels of how women are treated throughout history and through the various regions, empires, and countries, but most historians point to Christianity as the beginning of the true "equal rights" movement.

What does God mean by cursing the woman to "desire your husband and he shall rule over you?"

God had already established the role of woman as a helper to man. This was a peaceful, respectful position for both man and woman. The curse is that there is now resentment about being under the rule of man, about being the helper. Not only will most of the historical world move women to a lowly position, but even when women do have equality it will not be enough in their eyes.

V17-19

What was Adam's sin?

Verse 17 speaks of a greater sin than disobeying God. God told Adam the reason for his curse: Adam put Eve before God. Adam should have been responsible to God and obeyed God above all else. Instead, he chose to listen to the temptations of his wife. Some believe he made Eve an idol. At the very least, Adam could have saved himself and his relationship with God.

Because of this sin, man is now "burdened" with the responsibility of taking care of their wives and even daughters, to a lesser extent. The very ground that man tills and plants will fight him and make it difficult to provide for his family. What was once an easy stroll through the garden to find food will now become a daily, toilsome, back-breaking task which will wear them down. And the curse of the woman will make the woman resent the man for breaking his back and providing for his wife.

The final part of the curse applies to all mankind. Death is imminent. The Bible does not say what the fate of Adam and Eve would have been had they not eaten the forbidden fruit, but the curse implies some sort of immortality with God. We still have eternal souls, but we must now be faced with the consequences of our actions. We can choose Jesus, or we can choose Hell. There is no other option.

V20

Verse 20 introduces us to the name of the woman for the first time. The inference here is that Adam named his wife Eve, which means "to give life" in the original Hebrew, in hopes that the seed of woman would produce mankind's salvation. We do not know if there was any other name given to Eve prior to this other than simply "woman." Which, being that she was the only one, would have been sufficient.

V21-24

Where does God get the new clothes for Adam and Eve?

The "tunics of skin" means that God had to *kill* something and use the skin from an animal. This represents the first sacrifice in the Bible. It would be the first of many. Sin demands a bloody payment (see notes on sacrifice in chapter 22).

What is meant by God's statement that humans have become like God?

This is yet another sentence in the Bible surrounded by books of commentaries. It has been suggested that this may have been a bit of sarcasm on the part of God regarding the deception by Satan of humans having the knowledge of God, but this is not a popular theory and biblical scholars point out that this would be out of character for God. There is another idea that good and evil as we know it is a much smaller concept in God's greater scheme. The knowledge of good and evil is but a small sampling of the knowledge of God. Without the entire knowledge, this small bit of wisdom skews our perspective and ruins our relationship with God. Still, there are other commentaries that just declare this as one of the many mysteries of God.

Why does God not want Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of life?

There is an interesting theory that puts forth the idea that the only way for us as humans to escape sin is to die and leave this life and spend eternity in the afterlife. Had Adam and Eve eaten the other forbidden fruit, they would be cursed to live in sin in this life for eternity. We as humans after the curse

have no idea how good life can really be, especially as modern-day Americans. We tend to think this life is as good as it gets, and we want to squeeze all the good we can out of it. Most, if not all, don't realize how great the great-beyond really is if we submit to Jesus. Adam and Eve's life after the garden of Eden would be much more horrific than anything they had ever known.

The final implication of this chapter is that the Garden of Eden still exists, it is just not accessible. It is a place to meet God. Many scholars believe that Adam and Eve would return to the garden to interact with God, but their presence was always guarded by the ever-present angel with the flaming sword.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 begins the seed of mankind on Earth. It is a shaky start.

V1

This is the first direct mention of sex between Adam and Eve. There are differing viewpoints on whether Adam and Eve had sex prior to the fall or not, although the ending of chapter 2 alludes to a union of some sort. Regardless, this is the first childbirth on Earth. The first child would be born into sin.

What does the name Cain mean?

The Hebrew name of Cain means "acquired," "here he is," or "I have him here." This is not specifically stated, but it is likely that Adam and Eve both thought that Cain would be the Messiah that God promised would save them from sin during the curse. Thus, why they would give this name to their child.

V2-5

Verse 2 is used by creation literalists to contradict any "caveman" theories about human evolution. Cain and Abel both knew how to grow crops and maintain herds of animals. Pre-historic cavemen were said to be hunter/gatherers and did not maintain flocks or farms.

Why do Cain and Abel provide gifts to God?

There is no clear institution of sacrificial offerings at this point in scripture, but offerings were obviously made, most likely as an offering of gratitude towards God. Since these are not blood offerings to atone for sin, there is speculation that these could be considered tithe offerings. God is still directly interacting with mankind at this point and it is possible that Cain and Abel may have even been allowed to enter the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. There are some schools of thought that this was an instruction by God to mankind to help alleviate the curse of sin and allow early man to continue to commune with God (see notes on sacrifice in chapter 22).

Why did God accept Abel's offering, but not Cain's?

It is interesting that the book of Genesis doesn't elaborate on the difference between these two offerings. On the surface, there appears to be nothing wrong with either offering as both animal and grain offerings were acceptable. Some maintain that Abel offered the fat of the firstborn, later considered by Jewish sacrifice rituals to be the best portion, while Cain simply selected some of his crop and offered it nonchalantly. It isn't until Hebrews 11:4 that the Bible addresses this issue. Apparently, Abel's offering was more sincere and heartfelt than Cain's. It was the *attitude* behind the offering that spoke to God. God doesn't want our stuff. He wants our hearts.

V6-7

What is God trying to convey to Cain?

This presents an aspect of creation that Adam and Eve did not have to deal with. It is presumed that both Adam and Eve were created as mature individuals, and both were without sin upon their creation. Cain and Abel were both birthed and born into sin and never knew what a perfect life was like. But it wasn't just Adam and Eve raising their children. *God* was a parent to these children. As such, God was trying to instruct mankind how to deal with the knowledge of sin while still allowing them free will.

V8

There is some dispute here on whether Cain lured Abel into the field with the intention of killing him or that a disagreement had come about which led to a heated argument. Regardless, the first human murder and human death is recorded in the Bible. Adam and Eve outlived their second son, a testament to the fall of mankind that they caused.

V9-12

Not only did Cain murder his brother but he treated it casually as is evident in his response to God. This is a famous line which is still referenced in modern cultures. The Bible, and specifically Jesus, teach us that the answer is, "Yes, you are your brother's keeper."

This marks the first time that the earth soaked up the blood of a slain human. God's favorite creatures were tarnished with sin, but now sin is spilling over to other parts of creation. This caused Cain to be cursed to the point of not being able to farm anymore, which is all Cain had ever known.

V13-15

Not only does this section reflect the character of Cain, but it also poses a significant question concerning ancient history and creation.

What is Cain's reaction to the curse of the land and why?

Cain is the first murderer the earth has ever known. As such, all that Cain has ever known is taken away. Cain is in mourning, but not at the loss of his brother. He is in mourning over the loss of his own livelihood. Sin had so consumed Cain that he mourned only for himself.

If Cain and Abel were the only two offspring of Adam and Eve, then who would Cain be afraid of?

There are several possibilities offered by commentaries but no absolute certainties. One possibility is that angels also roamed the earth at this point and intermingled with humans. Second, the pre-flood Bible only records the births of males. It is not clear how many of Cain's sisters lived with the family or even if Cain wasn't the firstborn, but simply the firstborn *male*. Another possibility is that there were other brothers that the Bible doesn't record. Genesis 5:4 says Adam and Eve bore many sons and daughters and does not list all of them. Given any or even all these possibilities, Cain had other individuals to be afraid of.

Why doesn't God kill Cain?

God had already shown mercy to Adam and Eve after their sin. All sin is equally repugnant in God's eyes. There are consequences to sin, but mercy is one of the foremost traits of God's character.

What is the mark that God sets upon Cain?

The correct answer is no one knows. The Bible does not make it clear as to what mark would keep others from seeking vengeance on Cain for Abel's sake.

V16-17

Who is Cain's wife?

Obviously, this would be one of Cain's sisters. The need to multiply and produce offspring is an inherent human trait. Please note that the Levitical law concerning marrying a sister had not even been considered, let alone taken effect yet. The options for taking a spouse at this point were extremely limited.

Why is the naming of a city after Enoch significant?

Some think that the naming of this settlement after a human is one of the many indications that mankind became self-centered and self-serving, even in just the third generation out from creation.

V18-22

This is the first of many generational recordings in the Bible. One of the significant attributes of this lineage is that it shows the progression of human interests, as well. Farmers, tent makers, musicians and metal workers are all prominently featured in this heritage.

V23-24

What is the significance of the declaration from Lamech?

This is a prominent example of how pride took a foothold in humanity. Lamech is not only boasting about killing another person (of which there were few at this point) but boasted that his vengeance is greater than God's vengeance. It should also be noted that the line of Lamech is never mentioned again. He amounted to nothing more than a murderer and a boaster.

V25-26

The Genesis record specifically mentions Seth because this is the line that all humanity would descend from. Seth is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in the gospel of Luke.

Seth's line is also mentioned because this is the line that continued to worship God the creator and caused a "mini-revival" among the offspring of Adam and Eve.

The name Seth means "to appoint" or "to provide." The name Cain means "here he is." Some point to the differences in these names as a reflection of Eve's attitude towards God. She acquired Cain in order to fix the sin on the earth, but Seth was appointed by God to carry the line of the Messiah.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 contains mostly genealogy with a few highlights taking us to the time of Noah and his sons.

V1-2

These two verses are sometimes referred to as the signature of Adam. Some take this to indicate that this is the last account that Adam gives and that everything previous was recorded by him in some

manner. This would mean that the first four chapters of the Bible are all authored by Adam and scribed by Moses.

V3-20

This stretch of verses is the line of Seth, most likely the last-born of Adam, and down through Jared and his son, Enoch. Names of relatives would be re-used by descendants as both Enoch and Lamech will show up in this chapter, presumably as much different people than their ancestors from chapter 4.

V21-24

What does verse 24 mean when it states, "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him?"

Enoch appears as a special member of the line of Adam and Seth. Enoch had a son named Methuselah, which in Hebrew means, "When he is dead it shall come." Some scholars believe that Enoch had a special relationship with God and that Enoch realized what was to come thousands of years later. This may have allowed Enoch to be received into Heaven without passing through death. Regardless, the Bible holds Enoch in high regard. Both Hebrews 11:5 and Jude 1:14 mention Enoch and Jude even refers to him as a prophet.

V25-32

Methuselah is the longest-living human recorded in the Bible, living to the age of 969 years. Enoch, Methuselah, and his son Lamech would represent the last line of the God-fearing descendants of Adam before the wrath of God struck. All the other offspring would turn away from God. After Methuselah died, God brought the flood in chapter 7.

If the ages are accurate in this genealogy, this means Noah would be 14 years of age when Seth died. It is possible that Noah knew the direct son of Adam and Eve.

Noah's father, Lamech, was short-lived compared to most of his relatives at 777 years of age and was survived by his father, Methuselah by 5 years. Lamech still held the hope that the curse of God would end soon and, just as Adam and Eve named Cain in that hope, Lamech named his son Noah which means, "This one will give us comfort from our work and from the hard labor of our hands caused by the ground which the Lord has cursed." Noah would be a savior to mankind of sorts, but not in the way that Lamech had hoped.

Chapter 6

V1-2

With what by today's standards seems like unnatural long life, the offspring of Adam and Eve had plenty of time to procreate. Most scholars believe the Bible only records a small sampling of the genealogy prior to Noah. There could easily be several generations of offspring during one lifespan as was made apparent by the age of Seth at the birth of Noah. There is no clear indication of how populace the earth was in chapter 6, but it could easily be in the tens-of-thousands, hundreds-of-thousands, or even millions.

Who are the "sons of God" referenced here?

There are two primary schools of thought concerning what is meant by "sons of God." The first belief is that the sons of God belonged to the line of Seth and that the daughters of men were from the line of

Cain. The speculation is that this would be a union between a “godly line” and an “ungodly line.” The other belief is that the sons of God refer to angels, most likely those that were cast out of Heaven with Satan. This second theory is more supported by biblical references (Job 1:6, Job 2:1, Job 38:7, Jude 1:6-7) than the first theory. The Septuagint translates this passage directly to the Greek word, “angels.”

Regardless of the possible theories, evil was rampant among the newly created humans and God no longer wished to watch them wallow in sin.

V3-8

What does the phrase, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever...” mean in verse 3?

Have you ever been rejected? How many rejections does it take before you simply give up? Imagine being a parent of many children, most of which have chosen poorly in life and bring nothing but trouble well into adulthood. This is the point that God is at. His own creation has become sinful and succumbed to the temptations of Satan and of their own flesh. He can bear no more rejection of this type. He sets a timer for 120 years before He wipes man off the face of the planet.

What is meant by stating that giants existed both before and after ‘those days’ in verse 4?

Some translations call the offspring of the sons of God and daughters of man the Nephilim. They were unusually large, probably due to the unnatural union between angels and men. It is unclear what the ‘afterward’ comment intends here. Some think it may just be referring to giants after the flood. Others think that the line of man, even that of Noah, had been tainted with Nephilim traits and that those giants would show up later in scripture, although this can be disputed in verse 9. Some theories offer that Goliath from the time of King David was one of these beings or at least contained these traits.

What is meant by the statement that the hearts of men were continually evil?

There are different takes on what this means. Some scholars point to Matthew 24:37 to say that the wickedness of man during the time of Jesus was much like the current state of man. Some think it to be worse due to the prevalent theory of demons and human women producing offspring that would be much like their fathers. However bad it was, God wanted to erase his painting and start over in hopes of setting the path straight with the line of Seth and Noah.

V9-13

What is the description of Noah given in this passage and what does it mean?

Many believe this description to be a literal translation of a pure blood line, not tainted by angel blood. This is debatable, but regardless Noah was the last of a God-fearing, God-honoring line. He and his sons would be the foundation for the future of the human race.

What kind of picture is being painted of God through this judgement of all peoples on Earth?

Many use this as an example of a harsh, judgmental God instead of a loving, creative God. What should be kept in mind is God’s relationship with Cain. God tried to be a parent to a sinful child. It is most likely that God tried to be a parent to all of Adam and Eve’s offspring, but they had all fallen away. Even with the Garden of Eden still in their midst and the ability to commune with God, many had left for their own sinful desires. Many scholars think that the creation of God had been so tainted by the fallen angels that

humans were almost unrecognizable from their original design. Noah and his line are believed by most scholars to be the last untainted humans on Earth.

V14-16

These are the dimensions of the boat that Noah was to build. Rough estimates are 450 feet long by 75 feet wide by 45 feet high. These dimensions are bigger than the USS Constitution (305 feet long by 43 feet wide by 172 feet tall, including the top of the mast). This would be an unusually large vessel for the next few thousand years, let alone for the beginning of creation.

What is gopher wood?

This is still a mystery as the use of this term only appears in this chapter. Even the Jews are at a loss as to what the original Hebrew word is. The Septuagint translates this word to “out of squared timber.”

Although made with wood, the pitch would cover the ark inside and out and make it waterproof. It would also mean that it would be preserved for an extremely long time, likely even to become petrified.

What is an “ark?”

An ark, although technically a sea-worthy vessel, is not really a ship. It is a box or chest shaped structure that is meant to float. It’s more of a barge than a ship. Noah didn’t need to “sail” anywhere. He simply needed to float on the surface to survive for the next few months. This would, however, put him at the mercies of the currents.

V17-22

Some scholars believe that it had not yet rained on the earth and that the plant life and even animal life was provided water by mists or dew in the mornings and drinking water came from rivers and streams. If this is the case, Noah would be perplexed by God’s declaration of judgement and how it was to be carried out. The closing line of this chapter states the faithfulness of Noah even if he didn’t know what God meant. Building an ark of this size would be a major undertaking and take many years to complete.

Can the ark contain every species of animal and the food to provide for them?

It is still unclear how many animal species were in the original creation. But using modern information, the average size of an animal considering all species on earth is about the size of a dog or cat. There are, of course, much larger animals that would need to be accounted for (elephants, rhinos, giraffes, horses, bears, deer, moose, cattle, sheep, lions, tigers, gorillas, ostrich, emu, etc.) but the majority of all land animal species would be considerably smaller. If Noah adhered to a species (dog, cat, horse) instead of a breed (Terrier, Persian, Arabian) then the ark would be sufficient to hold the animals and the food to feed them for over a year.

Chapter 7

V1-9

What is implied when God says, “Come into the ark...” in verse 1?

This is a literal translation and shows that God was already in the ark. Noah and his family were to join God inside. If it is indeed true that God still allowed people to commune with Him in the Garden of Eden, this would not be possible during the flood. So, God entered the ark to commune with Noah.

This is the first mention of having seven of every clean animal and two of every unclean animal. In the previous chapter, God only said two of every animal *to keep alive*. This seems to indicate that the five spare clean animals were to feed the other carnivorous animals, possibly including Noah and his family.

This would be one of the most unusual migration parades ever seen by man. The different animals marching in formation up the ramp into a man-made boat would have drawn the attention of anyone nearby. Some explain this using the natural instincts of the animals. Some animals flee to safety when they sense danger. But the animals would have to know where the safety was and know to only have a pair arrive instead of every animal on earth. It is obvious that there was a supernatural work here. It is also important to note that God had not yet put the fear of man into the animals (Genesis 9:2) so their instincts would be to trust Noah and his family.

V10-12

The animals and the family of Noah entered the ark and waited for seven days before anything happened. Noah had spent over one hundred years building the ark. These seven days might have been a trial of faith but for two things: the animals arrived just as God said and, most importantly, God was with them.

How did the flood happen?

Not only did the rains come down, but the waters rushed from under the earth, as well. This indicates a major geological event. Some think that this may have been the separation of the “super continent” that is believed to have been the singular land mass upon the creation of the Earth. This super continent supposedly divided into the seven continents of the modern world. Although this is just one theory of the flood, this kind of massive land movement would certainly have severe geological impacts worldwide.

Is there enough water on planet Earth to cover the entire surface?

Yes. If every continent were to be equally leveled, there would be no more dry ground. Estimates range from two to three miles of ocean would cover the earth on equally dispersed ground.

V13-16

This passage is a recap of Noah, Noah’s family, and the animals entering the ark with one important aspect added: the door is shut.

Why did God close the door and not Noah?

With the rising waters and the realization that what Noah had been told by God was coming to pass, the rest of humanity, especially those closest to Noah in proximity, would be seeking shelter. If Noah had closed the door and not opened it for those coming to be saved, their blood would be on him. Only God can judge and only God can offer salvation. God painfully, sorrowfully, closed the door in judgement.

V17-24

The height of the ark was thirty cubits or forty-five feet. Moses recounts the global flood and says that the water was fifteen cubits higher than the ground. This is more than twenty feet deep, probably deeper in some places, and well within the two-or-more miles of coverage over equally dispersed earth.

How do we know the flood event was real?

The honest answer is there is no way to be absolutely certain. Putting faith in God often means believing without seeing. However, over 200 cultures have an account of a global flood in their history. These cultures include some tribes in New Guinea, American Indians, Hawaiians, Chinese, Australian natives, Egyptians, Greeks, and Brazilian natives. These are far-reaching lands that all have a similar pre-historical flood account. What's more, modern science is leaning towards a massive geological event involving a worldwide flood. Some think that this may be the event that created the Grand Canyon. Believing in the flood is not as far-fetched as some might think.

The flood waters happened for 40 days, but the waters completely covered the earth for about 5 months! Many scholars point out that at least some of the animals would have hibernated during this period which would save on food and stave off some predatory instincts from some of the carnivores.

Chapter 8

V1-5

How did God make the waters subside?

It is uncertain if Noah witnessed a supernatural tornado that carried water away or if this is just the easiest way for Moses (as the author) to describe what took place, but the flood was finally coming to an end.

What is indicated in verse 1 by the statement, "God remembered Noah?"

It is believed that God was in the ark when He called Noah and his family to join Him inside. This does not mean God stayed in the ark for the duration. This could mean that God rejoined Noah inside the ark at the end of the flood.

Why would God choose to place the ark on a mountain side?

There is no clear indication as to the purpose of God placing the ark on Mount Ararat. It's not even stated that God placed the ark there as opposed to the ark just blindly settling on this ground jutting up from the receding waters, which would be the simplest explanation. The higher elevation would also allow the ark to be preserved for quite some time as this would have to be the home for Noah's family until permanent homes could be constructed.

V6-12

There is some wisdom shown by Noah here in the use of the birds to determine if it was safe to leave the ark. Even though the ark had come to rest on the side of a mountain top, it did not mean that there would be sufficient dry ground for he and all the animals to inhabit. Birds could provide a perspective that Noah did not have.

V13-19

How long were Noah and his family inside the ark?

This question is under much debate as there are differing viewpoints of what a "month" consisted of during the time of Noah. Some think that a year was 360 days or 12 months of 30 days. Others think that Noah used a lunar year which is 354.36 days where the months depend on the cycle of the moon. It was most certainly not the 365-day modern Gregorian calendar which depends on Earth's rotation around

the sun (a solar calendar). The answers range from 364 days to 377 days depending on which calendar Noah used. This amount of time would be consistent with a major geological event.

It is safe to say that Noah and all onboard the ark were there for a year plus-or-minus a couple of weeks. They were probably incredibly grateful to finally open the door and go outside.

What is implied by verse 15 where God says, "Go out of the ark..."?

This is another indication that God was once again inside the ark with Noah.

V20-22

What did Noah's sacrifice consist of?

Despite housing at least two of every kind of species onboard and having to feed all those animals and themselves, Noah still kept one spare of every clean animal to use as a sacrifice when the flood was over! Noah could have let them live to help increase the chances of the species procreating but praising God and putting Him first was a priority for Noah. Which is why God spared Noah from the cleansing of the flood.

God is pleased with Noah and the sacrifice, and He creates the covenant to never again destroy man as He had just done.

Chapter 9

V1-7

What does verse 1 remind you of?

This looks similar to Genesis 1:28 where God told Adam and Eve to populate the earth. Noah and his family are the new Adam and Eve. God opens and closes His commands to Noah with this statement.

What are the implications of verses 2-6?

The common theme in this decree is 'blood.'

- God gives the animals to Noah and mankind just as He did with Adam. This is the first time that the Bible records God allowing the consuming of animal meat, although it is unclear if this the first time it is allowed or if this is simply the first time it is recorded.
- As such, God gives animals the fear of man. It would be necessary for mankind to hunt and work for their food. The animals would not just roll over and die at our desire.
- But God commands us to be respectful of the animal. We are not to kill just for the sake of killing. A blood sacrifice is to be made for every animal that is killed.
- The spilling of the blood of man must be accounted for. If the blood of animals is sacred, how much more so the blood of man whom God created in His own image?
- For those that spill blood (take a life intentionally or murder in the original language), their blood must be spilled. This is the first institution of capital punishment. God did not kill Cain when Cain killed Abel, but with this new decree, Cain's life would have been forfeit.

V8-17

After commanding Noah to populate the earth and giving His decree on blood, God creates a covenant between Himself and mankind.

Why is this covenant necessary?

The simplest answer is it isn't. God doesn't *need* to justify Himself to us. God didn't do anything wrong. As the creator, He saw His creation turned into something that it was never intended to be. God may have wiped the paint off the canvas, but He is still using the same canvas. He is establishing rules for mankind that didn't exist before now that are supposed to keep mankind from needing to be purged again. When the next purge does happen, it will be with fire, not flood (2 Peter 3:1-7).

Jude 1:6 alludes to God purging the Nephilim from the Earth during the flood, as well. Many believe that the flood was to eliminate a tainted bloodline between angel and man.

There are many commentators that believe that the way the earth maintained a water "blanket" in the atmosphere prevented humans from seeing rainbows prior to this event. The world-wide flood changed the water patterns from continuous vapor and mist to cycles of rainfall. This would allow man to see blue sky and rainbows for the first time.

V18-23

Noah's sons were tasked with becoming the fathers of mankind. Here is the first appearance of the name "Canaan," a name which will be seen later in the book of Genesis and elsewhere in the Bible. This is also the first time the Bible refers to alcohol. It is not known if fermented drink was available prior to the flood or not. It is also not clear how Noah learned fermentation, whether he was taught or learned of it accidentally. It is even possible that unintentional fermentation occurred on the ark giving Noah and his family the first "drunken sailor" stereotype.

What is implied by the actions of Ham in verse 22?

The literal translation of what Ham did is "told with delight" of his father's nudity to his brothers. Many think that this implies that Ham was trying to overthrow his father's authority. There are some schools of thought that Noah may have been sexually assaulted by Ham or someone else and that Ham was anxious to humiliate his father even further by speaking about it, although this is a theory and not confirmed.

V24-29

Why curse Canaan instead of Ham?

The Bible doesn't say why Noah cursed Ham's son instead of Ham directly. There are several possible reasons, but none are certain. Maybe Canaan played some unknown part in the humiliation of Noah. Or maybe Noah knew that prophetically revealing Canaan's ill destiny to Ham would be the biggest punishment he could issue.

There are some that believe that Ham and Canaan were darker skinned than their brothers and that their descendants populated Africa. Some people wrongly use this curse to justify slavery.

This chapter closes with the end of Noah's long and eventful life.

Chapter 10

V1

Chapter 10 is the beginning of the repopulation of the earth after the great flood starting with the three sons of Noah.

V2-5

The line of Japheth spread over several regions and settled many areas. Japheth is considered the father of the Indo-European people groups.

Gomer is believed to be the father of the Germanic tribes and his descendants settled Western Europe including the French, the Spanish, and the Celts.

The brothers Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, and Meschech all settled beyond Europe and are believed to be the ancestors of the Russians. Madai is believed to be the father of the ancient Medes which settled in Iran, Iraq, and India. Javan is the father of the ancient Greeks. The names of the offspring of Japheth can be directly correlated to modern tribes and locations. Kittim became the name Cyprus, Rodanim became Rhodes, Gomer became Germany, Meschech is Moscow, and Tubal is Tobolsk.

V6-20

This section covers the line of Ham. Ham is considered to be the father of Africa and the Far East. Cush's offspring would be the founders of Babylon and Ethiopia. Mizraim's children would become the people of Egypt. Put is the father of Libya and other areas of Northwest Africa. Canaan's offspring will become the Canaanites, the settlers of what will later be Israel.

Cush's son Nimrod is brought to light in this section. The name Nimrod means "let us rebel." Nimrod's kingdom contained the region of Shinar, also known later as Babylon. Nimrod's kingdom also formed Assyria where he formed the capital of Nineveh. Both of these regions would become major adversaries against the later people of Abraham, the "chosen people" of God. Some commentators note that Nimrod became the first "king" on the earth, and he ruled his dominion fiercely.

V21-32

Who are "the children of Eber" in verse 21?

The record of the line of Shem gives Shem a new title not yet seen. It is not made abundantly clear in scripture, but Eber, or Heber in some translations, appears to be a synonym or even root of the word "Hebrew." Eber is a descendant of Shem as seen in verse 24. This is the line where Abraham and the Israelites would descend from. Shem is in the genealogy of the Jews and Jesus.

Some other notable names in this group would be Uz, where Job is from, and the sons of Joktan are the source of various Arabic tribes. It is speculated that Jobab, son of Joktan, may be Job, but it is not certain. It is possible that even though Jobab is not a direct descendant of Uz that he still lived in the land of Uz.

Chapter 11

V1-9

This is the story of the "Tower of Babel." The early Babylonians used tar or asphalt to waterproof their buildings, the same type of waterproofing Noah used on the ark.

What was the sin of this people?

There is not a direct answer, but many sins can be taken from this telling. The most obvious is pride. These people didn't want to build a city for the sake of commerce or convenience. They wanted to make a name for themselves. Another possible sin is disobedience. God told them to populate the earth. They chose to stay together and form a city. Another take is the disbelief in the promise of God. It is speculated that this tower would be used to save themselves in case God wanted to flood the earth again. God had already promised not to do that, but it is believed that they didn't trust the God of their fathers and wanted a fallback plan.

Why did God not want the people to work as one?

Just as we as Christians are powerful when we gather in His name, man can become powerful when gathered in the name of man. God wasn't *afraid* of man; He was afraid of what man would *do*. We can easily find ways to distract ourselves from God. God was simply trying to slow down that process.

If the descendants of Noah had already spread out to different regions, wouldn't the Hebrew language persist in those regions?

The most likely explanation is that the early ancestors to the Babylonians drove all other groups out of their new homes. The people of Nimrod were taught to be fierce and territorial. Once they were scattered with new and different languages, they would have sought out people that didn't speak their "native" language and ensured that the land belonged only to themselves. This could also explain the fierce rivalries between the different regions that grew throughout history.

V10-32

This is the line of Shem all the way through Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Note that every verse says that everyone fathered other children, but only a certain line is being followed. The earth was becoming a heavily populated place (compared to just after the flood when there was only Noah and his family). This genealogy leads to the line of Abram who will be a Godly man.

Chapter 12

V1-3

There is no clear indication listed as to why God chose Abram to become the father of all nations, but the character of God seen in Genesis and throughout the Bible provides some insight into how Abram became the father of the "chosen people." God wanted to have relationships with Adam and Eve and all their children. God wanted relationships with Noah and his offspring. God talks to everyone but not everyone listens. Abram became the father of the Jews because he heard and obeyed God. The Jews are the chosen people not because God chose them, but because they chose God. Since Abram was the only one on earth that chose God, God blessed him throughout his life.

Abram acted on God's command to seek a new land and it paid off. There are those that believe (with good reason) that this promise is still in effect today. Abram is in the lineage of Jesus Christ making Abram the father of the Jews and the Christians. He is even in the line of the Muslims, giving Abram a founding foothold in three major religions of the world. Biblical historians point to the fall of those nations that opposed the Jews as evidence of the promise of God.

- The Greeks overran Palestine and desecrated the altar of the temple; they were then conquered by Rome.
- Rome persecuted Christians and destroyed Jerusalem. Rome fell soon after.
- Spain suffered many losses on the world stage after the Inquisition against the Jews.
- Poland fell after the pogroms.
- Germany was reduced to near servitude after the holocaust.
- Britain's empire shrank after breaking faith with Israel.
- The United States has been one of the few modern nations to grant full citizenship to Jewish people and to recognize Israel as a sovereign nation. America has been one of the most prosperous countries in the world.

V4-9

What does Abram do wrong here?

God commanded Abram to leave his family, but God still took Lot with him. This was only a partial obedience to God, and it would prove detrimental to Abram.

Even though Abram didn't fully obey God, he did trust God and built an altar to commemorate this promise. This would provide a place to meet with God, to offer sacrifices for sins and to worship the Almighty.

Even though God gave this land to Abram, he never built a house. Abram lived in a tent all the days of his life.

V10-16

What does the Bible say about Sarai?

Apparently, Sarai was one of the most beautiful women in the world. Jewish tradition holds that she was even more beautiful than Eve, yet there is obviously no way to compare the two. Abram may have felt insecure next to his wife which would possibly explain his actions in this passage.

What does Abram do wrong here?

First, God provided Abram a land to live off of, but when a famine hit Abram didn't trust God to get him through it. Abram went to Egypt in search of food.

Second, Abram encourages his wife to lie for him. The ten commandments had not been established at this point, but Abram was still aware of sin. Just because it wasn't written in stone doesn't mean it's right.

Third, God had made a promise to Abram to be the father of a great nation. Abram hadn't had any children yet so he should have trusted that God would provide and protect him at least up to that point.

Fourth, by lying to the Pharaoh, Abram allows someone else to have sex with his wife! Abram was to be the father of a Godly nation which means Sarai was to be the mother. Abram allows the mother of the Chosen People to be defiled by a heathen king!

V17-20

What are the actions of the king here?

The king doesn't believe anything wrong is being done. He fairly gives Abram plenty for his "sister." But once the turmoil begins, the Pharaoh realizes something is wrong and seeks to find out what it is. Once the truth emerges, the king rebukes Abram for the lie and reminds Abram that there is nothing wrong with telling the truth. A heathen king teaches Abram a Godly lesson.

What are the actions of God?

Abram was being disobedient and even faithless. Yet God held true to Abram. God is still going to keep His promise. God even provided gifts to Abram through the Pharaoh. We may disappoint God, but God does not disappoint us.

Chapter 13

V1-4

What did Abram do right?

Abram returned to the land that God promised him. He finally separated himself from the remainder of his extended family and he returned to the altar to call upon the Lord. His faith in God is still growing, but it is at least growing.

V5-9

Although both Abram and Lot are well off, there is some tension between the two families. This is one of the reasons God wanted Abram to go off by himself. Abram makes a generous offer to Lot. He divides the land that God gave him in half and asks Lot to pick which half he wants. Abram is also putting his faith in God again knowing that whichever land is to remain his God will bless him and cause him to flourish.

V10-13

Lot chooses the Jordan as his portion of the land and then the two part ways. Lot looked out over the Jordan and saw how lush it looked and how easy it would be to farm and raise animals there. The problem is that the Jordan is where the Sodomites reside. The Bible provides some foreshadowing here in saying that the Lord had not yet destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. This will come later (chapter 19).

V14-18

God reiterates His promise after Lot and Abram have separated. Even though Abram gave Lot the Jordan, God says His promise is still in effect and it will again belong to Abram. God waited until Abram was completely obedient to remind him of this vow. The Promised Land will be filled with the descendants of Abram.

Chapter 14

V1-12

There is actual historical and archaeological evidence to support a war between different empirical factions during this time in history. An archaeologist named Nelson Glueck documented his findings of villages being laid to waste.

Lot, in choosing the desirable lands, also chose where others would seek to settle and gets caught up in a war over who would rule this patch of earth.

V13-16

This passage produces the first usage of the word “Hebrew” in the Bible.

The Hebrew word “chanik” is used here to describe Abram’s forces. It is an ancient word that was not in use at the time of Moses writing Genesis, but it has been confirmed in outside sources, mainly Egyptian texts from 19th century BC. This is significant because by the time of Moses this phrase had evolved into the word “chanak” meaning “dedicate.” This is the root word of Chanukah. The difference in use of these phrases is one of many points of authentication in the validity and accuracy of Genesis.

The Bible does not say how large the armies of each king were, but it does say that Abram kept his own personal army of 318 men. The phrase “trained servants” (the aforementioned Hebrew word “chanik”) means that these were not just servants who picked up swords, but rather a security force skilled at battle. This alone speaks to the great wealth that Abram had acquired. Abrams’ army, along with the allies of Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner, would be quite the imposing show of strength. These men made quick work of the other armies they were up against.

Abram was an honorable family man. He would not let his family fall to foreign nations, especially nations where his family lived. Lot is restored in the land of Sodom.

V17-20

There is very little known about Melchizedek, although there is much speculation. The Bible calls him a king and a priest, but the Jewish priesthood would not be established until the times of Moses. The book of Hebrews refers to Melchizedek saying that Jesus is from this priesthood. Whoever he is, he knows Abram and God and offers blessings to each.

Salem would later become Jerusalem.

Verse 20 says that Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything. This is considered the first tithe in the Bible.

V21-24

The king of Sodom knew that he owed his empire to Abram and wanted to reward him with as many possessions as he desired. However, Abram chose to honor God by leaving his welfare in God’s hands. His Amorite allies were free to seek rewards as they wished.

Chapter 15

V1-6

Why would Abram be afraid in verse 1?

No direct explanation is given, but it is probable that Abram was living in fear of retribution from the five kingdoms that he went to battle against. This would also explain why God told Abram that He would be Abram’s shield. God also called Himself Abram’s great reward since Abram had turned down the reward offered by the king of Sodom.

Abram has an honest conversation with God, expressing concern and even doubt. This shows a relationship with honest communication. God is to be revered, but He wants a loving relationship with us.

Eliezer of Damascus was the chief assistant to Abram, not a direct relative. Abram was growing old and doubted the promise of an heir. God gently and patiently reminds Abram of His promise to provide descendants.

Verse 6 marks the first time the word “believe” is used in the Bible. Abram trusted, believed, and took to heart what God told him.

V7-11

There is speculation on how much time has passed between verses 1-6 and this passage. Some believe it is a short period. Others think that enough time has passed for Abram’s doubts to surface again. It is unclear either way.

Why does God ask for these animals to be brought before Him?

This is not a holy sacrifice, but a contract being drawn up. Early history did not have paper readily available to simply write and sign so the first means of creating a binding contract involved a blood oath. The carcasses of the animals would be split in two and lie on the ground. The two parties involved in the contract would then walk between the pieces of the animals repeating the terms of the contract aloud. The idea was that if one party did not live up to their end of the bargain that the fate of the animals would befall them. This is called “cutting a covenant,” or “cutting a contract,” or “cutting a deal.”

God did not immediately appear to seal this covenant, so Abram had to protect the blood oath from scavengers until God did walk through.

V12-16

Before God finalizes this contract, He gave Abram a vision of the future. His descendants would be enslaved for 400 years before being set free. This was the prophecy that would be fulfilled with Moses.

V17-21

A normal contract would involve both parties walking together through the animal flesh. Here, only God walks through. His promise is absolute and does not bind Abram to anything. This is an unconditional promise. This blood contract is a precursor to the unconditional love of a sacrificial Jesus. The Father took an oath on the blood of His Son to promise us eternity.

God took an oath to give Abram and his descendants specific land. This was not a figurative promise. This is a literal promise.

Chapter 16

V1-6

Who was Hagar?

It is heavily believed that Hagar was one of the “gifts” given to Abram by the Egyptian king in exchange for Sarai. This might have added to some of the vitriol between Sarai and Hagar since Hagar’s very presence would remind Sarai of her time in Egypt.

The concept of surrogate motherhood was nothing new in those days. Since Hagar was technically the property of Sarai, who in turn was the property of Abram, whatever child was born would still belong to Abram and his wife.

Their impatience with the promise of God caused them to take matters into their own hands rather than have faith that God knew what He was doing.

There is an obvious parallel between Adam and Eve and Abram and Sarai. Both husbands listened to bad advice from their wives instead of putting their trust in God. They both put their wives higher than God.

There is a strong possibility that Sarai was not only present during the insemination of Hagar but *involved*. It is believed that for a surrogate motherhood to take place, the wife who would assume the role of mother would be situated in between the father and surrogate while intercourse was taking place. There is another possibility that the surrogate would be sitting on the lap of the wife while the father impregnated her. The exact procedure of this practice is historically unclear, and it is not entirely certain that this practice was used in this situation so this should be treated as a possibility and not a certainty.

Was Sarai's anger toward Abram justified?

This question is a cause of great philosophical debate. This whole idea originated from Sarai. Hagar's contempt of Sarai is not Abram's fault. But ultimately, Abram should have said no to Sarai's suggestion. Had Abram put his faith in God above the suggestion of his wife all of this would have been avoided. One should always weigh the words of people against the promises of God.

V7-12

Why would God want Hagar to return to Sarai?

The Bible does not address this question directly, but the evidence is clear. Hagar was arrogant and out of place with Sarai and brought her much despair. Returning to Sarai after running away would be difficult and humbling. But God also wanted to assure Hagar that doing the right thing would be rewarded. Hagar would be the mother of Ishmael, the father of all the Arabic tribes. God didn't promise that Ishmael would have an easy life, just a sustained life and the father of nations. The strife between the two women, however, would not die down. The descendants of Hagar and Sarai, although fathered by the same man, would be enemies with each other even today.

Ishmael is the first person in the Bible to be named before their birth, just as John the Baptist and Jesus were.

V13-16

Hagar realized that this was a divine encounter. Being Egyptian, she probably did not know much about the God of Abram except what had been taught to her while under Abram's purview. Hagar named the spring where she was at "Beer Lahai Roi" or "the well of the vision of life." Moses indicates to his contemporary readers that this well is still present, and they should note the origin of the name.

Chapter 17

V1-8

What do the names "Abram" and "Abraham" mean?

Abram means "father of many." As he was childless up until his son, Ishmael, was born in his 80's this name would almost certainly be a reminder of what Abram *wasn't*. Now in his 90's, God changes his

name from Abram to Abraham, meaning “father of many nations.” This would seem like an impossibility to Abraham, which is exactly what God wanted.

V9-14

Why circumcision?

God has not yet required anything of Abraham for his part in the covenant. Now, God is revealing the part of the contract to be fulfilled by Abraham and his people. God does not clearly state *why* the foreskin is important, but this would not be an unusual request during this historical age. Many ancient cultures practiced this ritual for different reasons. The reasons for circumcision in historical accounts are mostly speculative, but this was considered a permanent commitment, such as pledging allegiance to a cause or even servitude. Circumcision simply became a permanent ritual with the Jews. This could be seen as a cutting away of the flesh to symbolize their faith in God instead of man. This could also be related to the “organ of procreation” as one commentator put it; a reminder of the promise of God that His chosen people would be as numerous as the stars. Another side effect of circumcision would be related to hygiene and, in turn, the possible cause of such a prolific procreation. In ancient times, cleanliness was not as desirable as it is in the modern world. The foreskin could be the cause of many health issues for both the man and woman. It has been shown that Jewish women are less prone to cervical cancer, most likely due to their husbands being circumcised.

Why circumcise infants at 8 days old?

There was no way for the ancient world to know this, but the infant immune system isn’t completely effective until 8 days old. Vitamin K, a blood clotting agent, is not fully formed until after day 5 and prothrombin, another blood clotting agent is at its highest levels on day 8. This would be the earliest that a safe circumcision could be performed and allow the infant to live a healthy, hygienic life. God picked the optimum day for infant circumcision.

Why would God alter the covenant now if the original covenant required nothing from Abraham prior to this?

With the state of health and hygiene in this era, a people group that was supposed to flourish could use all the help they could get. The benefits of circumcision gave the people of Abraham better chances to thrive. God wasn’t altering His covenant. He was making His covenant possible.

V15-16

What do the names “Sarai” and “Sarah” mean?

The name Sarai is most closely translated as “my lady” or “my princess” with an indication of nobility or honor of a single house. Sarah means the same as Sarai but removes the restriction of being designated to a single family. Sarah indicates nobility over a multitude of families or, in this case, nations. A queen among queens.

V17-22

What does Abraham mean when he says, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!” in verse 18?

Abraham is in joyful shock at this point. His faith is being rewarded after so many decades. He was still in doubt that he and Sarah’s bodies would be capable of producing an heir so he asks God to bless Ishmael

because he thinks that this blessing will still come through Sarah's surrogate son. God corrects Abraham at this point and fills him in on the plan. Abraham will produce another son with Sarah as the actual mother. Isaac is on the way.

God still blesses Ishmael because Abraham prayed for God to do so, but the Godly covenant would be with the line of Isaac, not Ishmael.

V23-27

This passage shows the complete obedience to the covenant of God. Abraham didn't partially obey as he did when he took Lot with him on his journeys but submitted to everything that God asked of him, and he did it immediately.

Chapter 18

V1-8

Moses is not clear on if Abraham recognized God immediately or if it took some time for an identity to be established. Regardless, Abraham is asking God to remain, even if only for a little while.

The hospitality offered to these three visitors would not be uncommon in ancient times. Travelers were often greeted, fed, and looked after as was the custom of that day, even more so being that God was the traveler.

V9-15

What does this section reveal about Sarah?

Through the story of Sarai and Hagar and now this passage, Sarah's character is being revealed. She can be impatient, doubtful, and take matters into her own hands. She even lied right to the Face of God when confronted with her own skepticism! Yet God still keeps His promise to her and Abraham.

Sarah is in disbelief as all she has wanted the majority of her life is to have a child. From her statement in verse 12, it is speculated that she and Abraham may not have even had sexual relations in quite some time, let alone be able to bear a child.

V16-21

God lets Abraham know that He will judge the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. God lets him know that He has a purpose for Abraham and that God is filling him in on the plans because of what Abraham will become.

V22-33

It is not made clear throughout this chapter, but it is assumed that one of the three travelers is God, and the other two companions are angels of some sort. These two angels depart and head toward Sodom. They will be seen again in chapter 19.

Abraham begins to negotiate for the lives of those in the wicked city. This section is an example of the compassion of Abraham. He is hoping that Lot and his family will be enough to spare the city from the wrath of God. Abraham is humble in approaching God about sparing the people, yet persistent in doing so. This kind of heart pleases God. Abram negotiates from 50 righteous people down to 10 righteous people. In chapter 19, only 4 are spared.

Chapter 19

V1-11

The Bible is not clear on whether Lot knew that these were angels or not. Most likely, he simply believed them to be human travelers.

What does it mean that Lot was “sitting in the gate of Sodom” in verse 1?

This indicates that Lot was some sort of civic leader or official. He may have submersed himself in the city of Sodom, but he at least still realized some right from wrong as he tried to protect these two travelers.

Verses 4-5 mention that the entirety of the men of Sodom came to abuse the new visitors. This is a clear indication of how far Sodom had fallen. They were selfish, lacked compassion for others, sexually immoral, and violent. In the book of Ezekiel, God compares the Jews to the people of Sodom (Ezekiel 16).

What is Lot thinking in verse 8 when he offers up his daughters?

There is one aspect to take into account when seeing Lot offer his daughters to be sexually molested by a crowd of men. In that era, it was customary to protect guests even over family. Even taking that into consideration, this behavior is barbaric and makes Lot little better than the mob at his door. It is unclear what motivated Lot to do this or what state of mind he was in to believe this to be acceptable. It is possible that he wished to maintain his stature and acceptability within the city of Sodom and his daughters' purity was a distant second to that position, but that begs the question “why not simply give up the guests?”

This passage shows that the angels were ready to begin their task of executing judgement. Their patience was at an end.

V12-16

If Lots' daughters were virgins, how were they married?

This is a reference to an ancient practice of establishing a marriage contract. His daughters were promised to men who were considered their husbands, but the act of consummation would not take place for approximately one year. Offering his daughters to appease the mob not only disrespected his daughters, but their respective husbands, as well.

Lot lived a life of compromise and when it came time for him to reach the people around him, they laughed at him. His sons-in-law did not believe in the God of Abram and Lot because Lot did not live a life that would convince anyone there was a God. Only Lot, his wife, and his two daughters were to be spared. Abram's negotiating with God to spare the city if 10 righteous people could be found was still shy by more than half.

V17-22

Even though Lot had compromised, God keeps His promises. The angels cannot act until Lot is safe. One last bargain is made to save the city of Zoar. Lot is to flee to this tiny village to find refuge from the coming destruction. The word “Zoar” means “small” or “insignificant.”

V23-29

What is meant by “rained brimstone and fire” in verse 24?

There is speculation that this could have been volcanic activity or even a meteor shower on the cities. In 2011, an archaeological team headed by Dr. Steven Collins from Albuquerque, NM, discovered charred human remains as well as one other important item of interest in one of the possible locations of ancient Sodom. A potsherd was discovered that had been transformed into trinitite. Trinitite is the greenish, glass-like substance created after an atomic blast. It is named after the Trinity site in Alamogordo, NM, where the first atomic bomb was tested. This substance covered the ground in the White Sands desert after the test.

Why was Lot’s wife turned to salt?

This is a unique judgement in the Bible. Lot’s wife is the only person in the Bible turned into a pillar of salt. The Hebrew word used in this verse for “looked back” can also be translated as “looking intently behind”, “lagged behind”, or even “returned back.” Her heart was in Sodom, and she did not want to leave.

Abraham watches the fire from a distance. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah would let Abraham know that not enough righteous people were found to save the cities.

V30-38

It is unclear why Lot and his daughters left Zoar to live in a cave. But he and his daughters were now isolated from the rest of civilization.

What were Lot’s daughters thinking?

It is believed by some that the daughters of Lot thought that the whole world had been devoured by fire and smoke. They would then consider it their duty to repopulate the earth. This is the only excusable explanation for their otherwise sinful behavior. However, the fact that they had to get their father drunk to accomplish this task suggests that their motives may not have been so noble.

The Moabites and the Ammonites would become bitter enemies of the Jewish people. Lot’s legacy is that of disgrace.

Chapter 20

V1-2

Why would Abraham lie about Sarah being his sister yet again?

Shortly after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham moved to a different region. This would put him in contact with new people. At this point Sarah is roughly 90 years old. Although it is possible that she could still be a beautiful woman at her age, it is more likely that Abraham was concerned with political relations. Abraham is a wealthy man displayed by the number of servants and livestock he had. Harems could also be an indicator of political status. It is possible that Abraham lied to avoid aggression or resentment from other tribes. Regardless of the reason, Abraham did lie and failed to trust God once more.

Please note that there are some historians who believe this may be a retelling of the first time Abraham lied about his wife (chapter 12). Although there are legitimate arguments for this case, most theologians believe that this is a separate incident.

V3-7

This passage does not go into any detail on who Abimelech is. It should be noted that Abimelech is a title and not necessarily a name as other “Abimelech’s” will appear later in Genesis. It is safe to say that he is not a follower of the same God of Abraham. But seeing God in a dream was enough to set his path straight. Abimelech reasons with God and God agrees with him. This is not out of character for God. He often presents us with extremes in order for us to see a bigger picture.

V8-18

What was Abraham’s response to Abimelech?

Just as in chapter 12, Abraham is rebuked by a heathen king for his lies. Instead of asking for forgiveness, Abraham offers excuses and half-truths. Abraham even attempts to shift the blame to God by saying that God caused him to wander and leave his family! This is not a good example of a God-fearing man. It would be up to God alone to prove Himself in this instance. Abimelech does as he was told, and God restores the house of Abimelech just as promised. And Abraham gets richer once again for lying about his wife.

Chapter 21

V1-8

It took 25 years, but God kept His promise. He may have even intentionally waited this long to prove a point. A child born of parents of this age is certainly a miracle.

What does the name “Isaac” mean?

The original Hebrew word means, “he will laugh” or “he will rejoice.” This explains Sarah’s expression of joy for her son.

It is unclear at what age a child was typically weaned from their mother during this era. There are some that speculate the age of 5 and some that even say the age of 12. However, most scholars believe weaning occurred at the age of 3.

V9-14

Even though the brothers are about 13 years apart, the sibling rivalry takes hold. It is not known if there was anything else that motivated the childhood conflict, but it was enough for Sarah to take action against Hagar and her child. This would effectively end the relationship between Ishmael and Abraham. Ishmael would be considered disowned or even dead to Abraham.

Does the exile of Hagar and Ishmael seem harsh?

On the surface, yes. By modern standards, most definitely. But God had a plan in place for decades and had made both Abraham and Sarah aware of that plan. Ishmael was the result of someone trying to alter the plan. God knew there would be strife between the two siblings, but He did not completely reject Ishmael, either. God would provide just as He promised.

V15-21

Abraham had found favor in God's eyes and God would not let any of his offspring suffer needlessly. Just as Isaac was blessed, so was Ishmael. His marriage to an Egyptian woman would spawn the Arabic people of the Middle East.

V22-34

There is much dispute as to whether this is the same Abimelech found in the previous chapter. Abimelech may have been used as a title instead of a name so this could be a different ruler than the one formerly dealt with.

The naming of the place of Beersheba and the mention of it in verse 14 indicate that the source material Moses was using to write this book may have been somewhat disjointed. Some think that this section may not be in chronological order, although it is most certainly within a relatively close time frame.

Abraham and Abimelech make a covenant in the same way God promised Abraham a son in chapter 15. Only this time, both parties walk through the animal remains and Abraham sets aside seven lambs to settle a dispute about a well.

Chapter 22

V1-14

This is a unique request from God to Abraham. Nowhere else in the Bible does God ask anyone to sacrifice their child to Him. The only other sacrifice of an "offspring" would be God the Father asking Jesus the Son to sacrifice Himself for our sake. It's also important to note that Moses wrote this story down not to scare people away from believing in God, but to show all the followers of God that He is trustworthy. He doesn't require a human sacrifice of His followers. *He* is the sacrifice for *us* as shown in the four gospels.

The big question: why would God test Abraham by having him sacrifice his son?

This is one of the most philosophically debated questions from all the Bible. God had made Abraham a promise concerning his son and now it looked like God was going to go back on His word. Did God really want to see Isaac die? Did God feel like Abraham wasn't good enough? Not at all. God had watched Abraham build his own faith over the decades. God wanted Abraham to realize where his faith lies. Abraham had waited so long for a son. He believed in God to fulfill that promise. But did Abraham put God's promise ahead of God Himself? God needed Abraham to be fully aware of his own growth and that the One who made the promise is greater than the promise itself.

If one takes into account that the birth of Isaac was a miracle by God, then wouldn't God have the right to do with that miracle what He wanted? Couldn't that be said of everyone, everywhere, from every era?

God would never ask us to do anything that He Himself isn't willing to do. In fact, God kept Abraham from sacrificing Isaac whereas Jesus was allowed to be crucified. God wanted Abraham, the Jews, and the world to understand this.

There are three contemporary covenant rituals that are prominent in Genesis:

- God walks through the blood and carcasses of sacrificed animals *alone* to show that He will keep His promise regardless of the actions of His creation (chapter 15). This covenant was usually performed by two people entering an agreement (see the end of the previous chapter).
- Circumcision is performed by Abraham and the Jews as a way to show devotion to the One True God.
- The sacrificing of offspring was a pagan ritual which many “gods” or religions required of their followers. The God of Abraham used this event to display that He was *not* a pagan God and would not require a human sacrifice. Once the sacrifice of Jesus occurred, no sacrifice of any kind is required.

Why did God call Isaac Abraham’s only son (verse 2)?

Ishmael is still the offspring of Abraham, but God told Abraham to do as Sarah told him and release Hagar and Ishmael from his care. Ishmael is essentially dead to Abraham (see chapter 21).

What can we learn from Abraham’s response?

The Bible shows an Abraham who woke up early, performed the necessary tasks, and traveled the three-day journey to the designated spot with the will to sacrifice his son. What the Bible doesn’t say is if Abraham slept that night. It doesn’t say if tears were shed. It doesn’t say if there was any worry or doubt on Abraham’s part. This task would surely make Abraham wonder if God was any better than the pagan gods of surrounding lands where human sacrifice was a routine ritual. But God had proven Himself to be real to Abraham. This task, although difficult, came from God and should be treated with reverence.

Theologians believe that Abraham’s faith was so strong as to think that God would raise Isaac from the dead after the sacrifice had been offered (Hebrews 11:17-19) but this passage does not specify what Abraham was thinking. Nor does this chapter reveal the conversation between Abraham and Isaac concerning this event.

What can we learn from Isaac’s response?

Verse 9 barely mentions Isaac other than that Abraham had bound him and placed him on the altar. But most scholars agree that Isaac would have been an adult male at this point, at least a teenager and maybe even in his thirties. Abraham is an old man. His son could have easily overpowered him. Isaac trusted his father and God.

What can we learn about God’s character from this?

Many take this passage as a reason to disbelieve in God. What kind of God would want to sacrifice a child? The reason this is such an important event in the Bible is because it shows that God *doesn’t* want to sacrifice a child. God has already had to wipe an impure human race off the face of the earth with a flood and more recently in Abraham’s lifetime destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. This event is supposed to signify God’s desire to *save* people, not destroy them. Abraham is the father of the Chosen People *because* of this event. The faith of Abraham is something that the Jewish and Christian religions hold in high regard as an example to be emulated.

Why are sacrifices necessary at all?

From the time of Cain and Abel onward, instances of sacrifices made to God can be found scattered throughout the Old Testament. But what makes a sacrifice necessary? Why is the cost of sin death? The simplest answer can be found in two words: “holiness” and “innocence.” When God created Adam and Eve, there was no sin and no need of any sacrifice to commune with God. Sin, or the willful disobedience of God, tainted what humanity is supposed to be. God’s holiness and humanity’s unholiness is what separates us from God. Death in this context is the separation from God for eternity. Innocence, or the lack of the knowledge of good and evil, is what allows humans to be with God. For whatever reason that we as humans may not be able to understand, this innocence brings us closer to God. And that innocence can only be found in those that are not guilty of sin. Animals and later Jesus would be the only acceptable sacrifices to God since they are sinless. This is another reason why God didn’t want Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Isaac was a sinful human and would serve no purpose as a sacrifice other than to test Abraham’s faith.

V15-19

The significance of this event on Abraham was not lost on God. God knew that this would be a struggle. God knew that this would be a difficult decision to make. God also knew that Abraham’s faith would prevail. God reiterates the promise He made to Abraham to express His pleasure in Abraham’s faith.

V20-24

This is a genealogy of the brother of Abraham.

Chapter 23

V1-2

What is the significance of recording the death of Sarah?

No other book of the Bible records the age at death of a woman. Not even the death of Mary the mother of Jesus is recorded. Nor does the Bible say to look to Mary as the example of a Godly woman. Sarah is mentioned twice as an example (Isaiah 51:1-2 and 1 Peter 3:3-6).

V3-16

This is a record of not only where Sarah is buried, but the process involved. Abraham showed courtesy and grace in negotiating for Sarah’s burial plot. The seller was also courteous. Abraham had won favor among his hosts, and they wished to conduct polite business with him in his time of mourning.

V17-20

In later parts of Genesis, it is revealed that this will become the family burial plot. Abraham, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah are also buried in this tomb.

Chapter 24

This is not made clear in the Bible, but this chapter may be from a single source, most likely a report provided to Abraham from his servant. The writing style is different from the surrounding chapters and written from the perspective of one who wished to provide a detailed account of events that occurred.

V1-9

The Bible does not clearly state this, but this servant is most likely Eliezer who is mentioned in chapter 15.

What does the term “put your hand under my thigh” mean in verse 3?

The exact meaning of this is unclear, but according to ancient Jewish custom this was an oath to be taken by a single person by placing their hand on the circumcised penis of the man they were taking the oath for. Although seemingly uncouth and even grotesque by modern standards, this was apparently a common practice during this time.

Why does Abraham not want Isaac to leave?

This is not made clear in this passage, but Isaac in his entire life never once left the Promised Land. He always resided in the land of God. This is also not indicated here, but this is very likely on purpose, although the reason for this is vague.

V10-14

Why did Eliezer choose this method to search for Isaac’s bride?

It is often noted that circumstantial signs from God are rarely reliable. This is mostly due to human nature seeing what they want to see. In this case, Eliezer set forth a real, yet improbable expectation. A camel can drink up to 20 gallons of water. 10 camels would equate to roughly an hours’ worth of work for a person so it would be against the odds for someone to offer their services in this way. Eliezer wisely asked God to introduce him to a Godly woman who showed kindness and compassion.

V15-32

Even before Eliezer finishes his prayer, he sees Rebekah and God is fulfilling his request to find the right bride. Eliezer waits to see if she will actually do what she says. He wants to know she has a servant’s heart before becoming the bride of his masters’ son.

Once Eliezer is satisfied that God has so quickly provided what he is looking for, he begins to inquire about the family of Rebekah. He begins by giving Rebekah gifts of gold adornment. Eliezer then meets Laban, Rebekah’s brother, and negotiations continue from there. The gifts of gold would assure favor to Eliezer in the eyes of Laban’s household.

V33-49

This is a recount of all that has happened in this chapter so far.

V50-61

With Eliezer’s intentions laid out before them, the family must make a decision. Laban and Bethuel, the father, appear to be aware of the God of Abraham and do not dispute the head servant of Abraham. Eliezer provides the dowry to Rebekah’s family and requests to be on his way. There is a little dispute about whether to leave immediately or whether to wait 10 days for a family farewell, but Rebekah settles this with her willingness to depart right away. She has an obedient servant’s heart.

V62-67

What is the significance of Rebekah’s veil?

A veil symbolizes chastity, modesty, and even submission. This tradition is still used in modern weddings. Rebekah chose to show these characteristics to her new husband on his first impression. She was also showing wisdom to go along with her heart.

Along with the symbolism of the sacrifice of Isaac mirroring that of Jesus, we can see another foreshadowing here. Just as Abraham desired a bride for Isaac, God the Father desires the church to be the bride of Christ.

Chapter 25

V1-11

This is an account of the end of Abraham's days. Despite not having the ten commandments or the Levitical law, Abraham lived a Godly life and established the Chosen People of God. He is considered the father of three major modern religions, the Muslims through the line of Ishmael, the Jews and, in turn, Christians, through the line of Isaac.

There is not much mention of Keturah outside of this chapter. Despite being of old age himself, Abraham still had many sons after the death of Sarah possibly indicating that Sarah was barren with the exception of the miracle of Isaac.

Even though Isaac had received the primary blessing and inheritance, Abraham still provided wealth for his sons while alive and they were not left wanting.

It is also interesting to note that Ishmael, although banished, still attended his father's funeral. There appears to be no animosity between Isaac and Ishmael.

V12-18

Ishmael is still an important enough figure to have his lineage and death recorded by Moses.

V19-26

Isaac experiences some of the same childbearing hardships that his father did. Rebekah only provides two sons, still one more than Abraham and Sarah.

The name Esau means "hairy" which would be a physical description of the first-born. The name Jacob translates to "heel-catcher" which had the linguistic idea of a "trickster" or even "conman." This is not a complimentary name.

Why choose Jacob over Esau?

For the older to serve the younger would be a very foreign idea in this era and culture. The first-born son always bore the duties and received a double inheritance of his father's household. There is no clear explanation why the younger would be favored in this case other than that this is what God wanted. This could simply be another example of God defying the order of man and doing things His way.

V27-34

What does verse 27 mean when it calls Isaac a mild man?

The Hebrew word for mild is used more to describe someone as wholesome as opposed to a more modern meaning of non-aggressive or even weak. This same word is used by God to describe Job in Job 1:8.

The remainder of this chapter shows the words of God coming true. Esau thinks little of his inheritance, although it is unclear why. He is willing to trade it for a bowl of soup. Jacob, as a vigilant conman, makes his brother swear an oath to make him the new head-of-household. This would be a legal transaction.

Chapter 26

V1-5

The first section of this chapter is remarkable in that Isaac is going to relive some of the experiences of his father Abraham. Isaac is in the midst of a famine, but God intervenes and keeps him from leaving the promised land, although he approaches closely to Egypt. Isaac obeys and does not leave the land of Abraham.

The Abimelech mentioned here is most certainly different than those that his father Abraham encountered, but an authority figure in the region none the less.

V6-11

Abraham made this same mistake twice in his lifetime and Isaac is doomed to repeat it. Isaac lies about his wife and is rebuked by a pagan king. Isaac is even shown favor by this king just as Abraham found favor in the eyes of his foreign lords.

V12-17

What is significant about stopping up wells in this era?

Isaac inherited his father's wealth and probably did not have to work much, but he worked anyway and was rewarded for his hard work. His wealth was enviable to his Philistine neighbors, just as Abraham's wealth was. The Philistines had been warned against harming Abraham and now Isaac, but the wells appeared to be fair game. All wells had to be dug by manual labor and took days, if not weeks to dig deep enough to reach water. And then the well had to be secured and protected to be easily accessible. Cutting off the water supply of an adversary was an easy and powerful tactic. Just because they could not harm Isaac doesn't mean they wanted him around. The Philistine's used this method to strongly suggest that Isaac find a new residence.

V18-25

Isaac returns to where his father spent the remainder of his life and has to dig even more wells. His father's land had been treated in the same way in the hopes that the sons of Abraham would move elsewhere.

Upon digging up the wells again, his servants discover a pressurized well and water starts to flow. This is a great provision to Isaac as running water is much easier to distribute than well-water from a bucket.

Rather than fight with the locals, Isaac seeks a peaceful approach and simply moves locations. The first well is named "Esek" which means contention. The second well is named "Sitnah" which means opposition. The third well is named "Rehoboth" which means roominess. Isaac ends up in Beersheba where Abraham had once lived. God was using the resentment of the Philistines to guide Isaac back to the land of his father and to safety. Once there, God reiterates the covenant with the line of Abraham. This is the first time God appears to Isaac as He appeared to Abraham.

V26-33

Once Isaac is where God wants Him to be, the blessings begin to pour out more. Abimelech, a pagan king, comes to Isaac seeking a peace treaty because he sees the God of Isaac is powerful. Isaac is blessed by the many times he finds water in what would be considered a desolate land.

V34-35

The chapter closes with the marital status of Esau. Esau had sought the company of Hittites in the land of Canaan. It is not stated clearly, but Esau appears to have been a rebellious son and did not obey the wishes of Isaac and Rebekah.

Chapter 27

V1-4

What's wrong with Isaac wanting to bless Esau?

God told Isaac that the future would be through Jacob. Isaac still favored Esau and even though the birthright had been deceitfully given to Jacob, Isaac still sought to bless Esau in what is thought to be his last will and testament. The blessing is a legal and binding covenant, just as a legal last will and testament is today. This would in some ways, at least give a strong inheritance back to Esau.

It is estimated that Isaac was 137 years old at this point, but he lived to be 180. This seems to have been a premature blessing, although Isaac's age in this passage is not certain.

V5-26

What are the similarities between Sarah and Rebekah here?

Just like Sarah, Rebekah was aware of God's plan but decided that God needed help. Instead of trusting God to do what He says, she acted on her own accord and brought deception into God's plan.

Isaac wanted to usurp God's plan by giving his possessions to Esau, but Rebekah was no better in trying to determine how God's plan should be implemented.

Jacob is no better than his parents in this passage. He is under orders from his mother, but he easily lies to his father and even invokes the name of God in doing so.

V27-29

The blessing itself appears to be a preplanned poem that Isaac had given great thought to. Its words are beautiful and carefully chosen. This otherwise artistic declaration is surrounded by lies and disobedience.

V30-40

It is believed that Isaac is so upset because not only had he been tricked by his wife and youngest son, but that he wanted to change God's plan and failed to do so.

As Esau grew older, he realized what the status and political position could do for his personal gain. Esau was upset because he was not smart enough to realize what selling his birthright meant and even though now that he was smart enough, he still lost out on his father's inheritance.

Isaac gives what little he can to his firstborn, but it is little. Esau would not be under his brother forever and would have to survive off what the land provided him.

V41-46

Esau is consumed by bitterness and vengeance. He has no desire to follow God and it appears as if his parents have not given him any reason to.

What is the significance of what Rebekah tells Isaac in the last verse?

This is Rebekah getting permission from Isaac to send Jacob away to find a wife. In reality, she is trying to keep Jacob safe from Esau. This would be the last time she sees her youngest son.

Chapter 28

V1-5

Isaac appears to be resigned to the will of God and gives Jacob his blessing. His one requirement is that he take a wife from the same place that he did. Isaac passes along the blessing of his father Abraham to his son Jacob. Looking at the core family of Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob, it is amazing that God wanted to have anything to do with them. But it is this very scenario which should bring all future generations comfort, for who can say that they are any better than a member of this family?

V6-9

Esau acts out of spite here. The lost birthright which only now he fully desires causes him to resent not only his brother but now his father. He does what Jacob can't and seeks out a Canaanite wife.

V10-17

Despite the actions of Jacob's family, God still communicates with Jacob through a dream.

What is the significance of Jacob's Ladder?

God created Earth as a place of communion between Him and His creation. Sin interrupted that communion. God is letting Jacob know that communion is still possible, it's just more difficult. Humans were made for Earth. But God is showing Jacob that he and all that follow can still have communion with God in Heaven. There is still a connection that can be made. Through the line of Jacob would come the Messiah. Jesus is the ladder that bridges the gap between Heaven and Earth. John 1:51 and John 14:6 both allude to this.

God reiterates His promise to Abraham which is now being passed to Jacob. Jacob, as deceitful as he is, is blessed by both Isaac and God.

V18-22

What is wrong with the actions of Jacob in this passage?

On the surface, nothing appears to be out of place. Jacob is honoring God by remembering the place where God appeared to him. But most scholars point out that Jacob is honoring the *place* where he met God, not God Himself. Jacob does not yet fully understand the dominion of God and that He has no geographical limitations. Jacob's lack of understanding is made even more evident by his conditional vow to God.

Chapter 29

V1-10

Why does Jacob ask the shepherds where they are from?

There is more significance to this statement than would be thought of by modern standards. There were no fences, road signs, or even clearly marked trails in some cases back then. Foreigners had to depend on the kindness of strangers for directions.

Why did Jacob tell the shepherds to go feed the sheep?

This passage does not clearly state the reasons for Jacob telling the shepherds how to do their job, but the general consensus is he saw Rachel and wanted to be alone with her. Not for mischievous purposes but to get to know her better.

Why did Jacob open the well?

This would show courtesy and perhaps even some strength to Rachel. Jacob was already beginning the courting process and even showing off.

V11-20

Jacob greets Rachel with a kiss. Not a romantic kiss, but a familiar kiss. Still, he waited until after the kiss to tell Rachel that he was her cousin.

Now Jacob is introduced to his uncle Laban. The two appear to get along well and become fast friends.

What does the phrase, "Leah's eyes were delicate (or "weak" in some translations)" mean?

There is not a clear understanding of the exact intent of this description. Some think that Leah could have had difficulty seeing. Others translate this as her eyes were lackluster, without spirit, or even dull. Regardless, Leah's description is a far cry from Rachel's description.

Jacob agrees to terms with Laban for Rachel's hand in marriage. His seven years of indentured servitude have begun.

Although Jacob came from the line of Isaac, he had left home with no money. These seven years of servanthood would act as the dowry for Rachel.

V21-30

How was Jacob able to be fooled into marrying the wrong woman?

The wedding customs of the day kept the bride veiled up until the bride and groom were finally alone. Laban could arrange the wedding to take place late in the afternoon or even evening. Laban, as the head of household, could have told Rachel to stay hidden. We do not know if Leah was in agreement with this process or if she had to be ordered, as well.

The excuse Laban gives Jacob is an obviously deceptive trick. Whether this was an actual custom or not, Laban should have made Jacob aware. Jacob, the conman, had been conned. Jacob would serve another seven years to acquire Rachel.

V31-35

The only true innocent victim in this scenario was Leah. God showed compassion to her through her gifts of childbirth. It clearly states that Jacob did not love Leah, but he still had sex with her enough times to produce many offspring. This type of relationship is still emulated today. Women will use sex as proof of love and men will have sex regardless of love.

Sons of Leah:

- Rueben: meaning “Behold, a son”
- Simeon: meaning “Hearing”
- Levi: meaning “Attachment” – this would become the priestly tribe of the Jews
- Judah: meaning “Praise” – this would become the royal tribe of the Jews

Chapter 30

V1-4

Leah was jealous of her sister’s beauty, but Rachel was jealous of her sister’s children. Rachel acts in the same way that Sarah did and offers her husband her maidservant for a surrogate motherhood.

V5-8

Bilhah was used twice as a surrogate and bore Jacob his fifth and sixth sons.

- Dan: meaning “judgment”
- Naphtali: meaning “wrestle”

Rachel thinks that these two sons vindicate her rivalry with her sister. The birth of Naphtali and his name indicate how deeply seeded this jealousy was.

V9-13

Leah was still ahead in the childbearing race, but she was not about to let her sister catch up. Leah uses Zilpah to give more children to Jacob. Supposedly, Jacob only loves Rachel, but he has had sex with four women.

Zilpah gave birth to Gad and Asher

- Gad: meaning “troop” or “good fortune”
- Asher: meaning “happy”

V14-21

This passage is important for several reasons. First, this shows the animosity between the two sisters. They would use their own sons as weapons against each other. Second, Jacob doesn’t appear to care who he has sex with as long as he has sex. Third, Leah conceives on her own again without needing a surrogate. Leah now has six sons. She also gave Jacob what appears to be his first daughter. Leah names the daughter Dinah which in Hebrew means “justified” but this passage does not record the significance of the name, if any.

- Issachar: meaning “reward”
- Zebulun: meaning “dwelling”
- Dinah: meaning “justified”

V22-24

God finally lets Rachel conceive. Despite the rivalry, jealousy, and bickering, God still has compassion on His creation. Rachel names her son Joseph, meaning “May He add” in hopes that God will give her even more sons.

V25-36

This passage is almost a stark contrast to the first half of the chapter. This shows a Jacob that is obedient to God, that remembers the covenant with Abraham, and that trusts in God to provide for him even with the odds stacked against him.

What is the significance of taking the speckled or striped animals as opposed to the spotless animals?

Apparently, the unblemished animals were more attractive and provided a higher market value. Although the laws concerning sacrificing unblemished animals are not in place yet, spotless livestock was recognized as more desirable and would be a requirement of God and His priests from the time of Moses onward.

V37-43

What is the significance of the poplar rods?

It is not made clear here, but this was used to increase the number of speckled and spotted animals in the herds. Whether there is something in these plants that causes discoloration or if God simply used this as a method to increase the wealth of Jacob is not clear. Either way, the number of Jacob's flock increased dramatically.

Chapter 31

V1-3

Laban's sons see the wealth that Jacob has accumulated working for their father and accuse him of stealing. This causes tension between Jacob and Laban even though Jacob had done nothing wrong. It was the envy of Laban's offspring which caused the tension.

It is unclear if Jacob sought out God or if God simply appeared to Jacob (v11), but God had a plan, and it was time to let Jacob in on it. God used this time to prepare and grow Jacob.

- Jacob had learned the harm of his own deceitful actions by being deceived by Laban
- God wanted Jacob to return to the Promised Land on his own desire. God used Laban and the tension of the family to urge Jacob to leave.
- God showed his care and protection over Jacob by providing him the wealth he had accumulated (see the following verses)

V4-16

Jacob discusses God's plan with his wives. Even the daughters of Laban see the deceitfulness of their father. Jacob, for all his flaws and faults, acted honorably while working for Laban and God rewarded him for it.

V17-21

Jacob gathers all his possessions and sets out for Canaan. It is important to note that camels were a sign of wealth in this day. The fact he could have his family travel on camels showed that he had acquired a great amount of wealth.

Many scholars point out that Jacob did not have to secretly run away. He had been promised safety by God. That should have been enough for him to approach Laban and declare his intentions. Instead, he is deceitful once again and discretely disappears.

Why did Rachel take the idols of Laban?

The reasoning is not provided in the Bible, but perhaps the reason can be found in the culture of the time. A few possibilities are:

- These idols could be significant to Rachel, and she continued to worship them despite being married to Jacob and knowing his God
- Maybe she did not want her father to inquire of the idols and seek after them when they left
- Sometimes in this era and culture, idols were used as deeds for possessions. She may have been trying to steal the family inheritance.
- Rachel might have simply stolen them out of spite
- Jewish tradition holds that maybe she took them to keep her father from idolatry, although there is no Biblical reason behind this belief

V22-32

Laban and his family had lots of land, so it took a few days before he noticed that Jacob had departed. Laban pursued Jacob for seven days before catching up with him. Gilead, in verse 25, is just outside of Canaan. Jacob was almost home when Laban caught up with him.

Laban is a good conman and tries to shame Jacob for leaving covertly. Jacob recognizes Laban's tactics and is not fooled. Laban then shows his true colors and tells Jacob that he could overtake him by force, but God had warned Laban against doing such a thing.

Laban then confronts Jacob about his stolen idols, but Jacob is unaware that this theft had taken place. He even curses the person that took them, not knowing that it was Rachel.

V33-42

After a careful search and deceitfulness on the part of Rachel, Laban comes up empty in his effort to reclaim his idols.

Jacob, instead of scurrying away as he did previously, confronts Laban and calls him out. Jacob describes his honest work and the treachery of Laban during the last 20 years and Jacob has had enough.

V43-55

Laban and Jacob decide to part on peaceful terms, although Laban is still characteristically out of line. Laban "allows" Jacob to keep his wealth that he rightfully earned. The sight of this covenant has three names. Jegar Sahadutha and Galeed mean the same thing, "heap of witness", just the former is Aramaean and the latter Hebrew. The third name, Mizpah, is given because Laban insists that this stone monument will represent the watchful eye of God if Jacob should do wrong by him. Laban is so deceitful that he has no trust of anyone else. It is impossible for him to believe that anyone would not be conniving because he himself cannot keep from being so. This parting is the last mention of Laban in the Bible.

Chapter 32

V1-2

Why does God wait to send angels to Jacob until now?

It is unclear in what manner Jacob knew there were angels with him. Whether it was a vision, a physical incarnation, whether it was just Jacob that knew they were there, or Jacob's entire party was aware is not stated. But once Jacob was away from Laban and headed back to the Promised Land, Jacob was shown favor from God. Maybe Jacob needed to learn some valuable life lessons over the course of the last 20 years to be able to see and rely on God more.

V3-8

Jacob wishes to make peace with Esau. He states that he has accumulated his own wealth and is not coming to take anything from Esau. He comes to Esau humbly as someone who has spent the past 20 years in servitude. Although this passage does not provide a verbal response from Esau, 400 men enroute would surely be enough to cause Jacob distress. He is still lacking faith in God and decides to break up his party into two so that the survival rate will be higher in case of an attack.

V9-12

This prayer comes from a humbler and more mature Jacob than has been displayed previously. His experience with Laban must surely have shown him how not to behave and his experience with God, although still growing, is stronger than it has been prior.

V13-23

How is Jacob's attitude about Esau different than his confrontation with Laban?

Although Jacob stood boldly before Laban (after trying to sneak away), he cannot do the same with Esau. That's because Jacob knows that he has wronged Esau. Jacob knows that Esau's anger is justified and he is trying to make amends. He is hoping that an impressive array of gifts will soften Esau's heart before he finally arrives to see Jacob. With Laban, Jacob was in the right and now he knows how Esau must feel towards him.

Jacob sends all his party away. He wants to spend some time alone before finally confronting Esau.

V24-32

This is perhaps one of the most famous stories in all the Bible, as well as being one of the most debated. It is not made clear here exactly who is wrestling with Jacob. The text simply says a man in some translations, some say God the Father, some believe it is Jesus, and others simply state an angel of the Lord. Regardless of which incarnation of God this is, it is God that initiated the wrestling match.

Why is God having a physical altercation with Jacob? To what purpose?

This was an all-night struggle. The feeling of the text is that this is a parent struggling against a rebellious teenager. Jacob had come a long way, but he still had plenty to learn before he entered the Promised Land once again. Jacob is humbled at the length and struggle with this "man." A simple touch rendered his leg useless. This was a fight Jacob would not win. Jewish tradition (Hosea 12:3-5) holds that Jacob wept in defeat at the futility of the struggle and begged God for a blessing. God wants Jacob to learn the senselessness of going against God's will. He wants Jacob to realize who He really is, and that God is all Jacob needs.

What does it mean that Jacob prevailed in the struggle against God (verse 28)?

Jacob didn't prevail *against* God. Jacob prevailed over his struggles with himself. Jacob was finally learning to trust in God and not lean so much upon himself. Because of this, God grants him a blessing and changes his name to Israel. The closest translation of Israel is "God rules."

Why doesn't God answer Jacob when Jacob asks Him His name?

A clear reason is not given but most commentators think that God knew that Jacob already realized who He was and there was no reason for God to clarify Himself. Jacob names this place "Peniel" meaning "Face of God", so Jacob did know exactly Whom he was wrestling.

Chapter 33

V1-3

In the previous chapter, we see Jacob sending the party on ahead of himself. After Jacob wrestled with God, Jacob now leads the entire procession. Although he still shows favoritism to Rachel by sending her after the maidservants and Leah, he is at least bold enough to be at the head of the line. He humbly bows before his brother in what is believed to be an act of repentance.

V4-11

Not only had God been working in Jacob's life, but He apparently had been working in Esau's to some degree. The once bitter rival greeted Jacob as a loving brother. We see that not only Jacob has been blessed with wealth, but Esau states that he is content with what God has provided him, as well. God has given each of these sons the ability to be grateful for what they have.

The exchanging and accepting of gifts is significant here. In this culture, one never accepted gifts from an enemy. To accept Jacob's gifts would be to accept his friendship and his apology.

V12-17

It is not clearly stated here, but the geography is important. This shows that Jacob is still reluctant to be too close to his brother. From where they met, Seir would be to the south of them. This is where Esau was headed. Jacob went north to Succoth. The reconciliation has taken place, but trust is still a long way off for Jacob. Not only is he reluctant to trust Esau but he is reluctant to trust God.

V18-20

Jacob settles in the Promised Land, but still not exactly where God wants him to be. Jacob is at least aware of God's provisions enough to build an altar and offer sacrifices to God in gratitude. Shechem would later be called Sychar, the town in Samaria where Jesus would talk to the woman at the well (John 4).

Chapter 34

This chapter is commonly referred to as a shameful instance in the history of Israel. It is a story of the vengeance and even deceitfulness of man, descendant of Abraham or not.

V1-4

Jacob was still not as trusting in God as he should have been. Just like Laban, it was hard for Jacob to trust anyone because he himself was not trustworthy. Instead of going to Bethel as he was told (Genesis 31:13) Jacob chose to live near Shechem. This would cause he and his family great harm.

Shechem desired Dinah, but not in a loving way. He wanted her as a prize or as property.

It was common among the Canaanites for unattached women to be treated in this way. Single women were considered fair game until they belonged to a man. Raping a married woman dishonored the husband of that woman. Raping a single woman carried almost no consequence. Jacob had chosen the territory he occupied poorly.

V5-7

What is Jacob's reaction here and why?

Jacob had very little reaction to this news. It was still shocking enough that he felt he needed to tell his family, but it seems this was almost done in passing. What is not clear is what caused this reaction. It is not known if Jacob simply didn't care about Dinah, if he was afraid of the people of this land, or if there was some other unknown reason.

Regardless of how Jacob reacted, his sons were furious. Something had to be done. Without the proper leadership of their father, they would take matters into their own hands.

V8-12

What is the attitude of Hamor and Shechem towards this situation?

As Canaanites, they see nothing wrong with what they've done. They think they are being generous by offering payment for Jacob's daughter as a bride! It is unclear what laws or traditions the descendants of Abraham had at this point, but it was obviously very different than that of the Canaanites.

V13-17

There is a bit of foreshadowing in verse 13 as this verse states that Jacob's family meant to deceive Hamor. Instead of taking money, they offer a "resolution" of adhering to the Abraham covenant of being circumcised. Just as Jacob invoked the name of God to lie to his father (Genesis 27:20) now his sons do the same thing.

V18-24

In this section the true colors of Shechem and his father continue to reveal themselves. Not only is the raping of Jacob's daughter a trivial matter to deal with, but by appearing to go along with this covenant agreement it will be easier for the wealth of Jacob's family to become theirs.

V25-29

The reason circumcision is desired to be performed on infants is so that the child has no memory of the pain of this act. Circumcision without any pain medication can be incapacitating for several days. Simeon and Levi both take advantage of this state of affairs and wipe out the people of Shechem. The rest of Jacob's children arrive and loot and pillage what remains.

V30-31

What does this conversation between Jacob and his sons tell us about Jacob?

Jacob is mostly concerned about himself and the repercussions that this will have on him. The treatment of his daughter is almost inconsequential making him little better than Shechem at this point. If he had listened to God in the first place none of this would have happened. Still, if he had been concerned about what God wanted from him and his family maybe he could have given better direction to his sons

on how to act in this matter. Shechem needed to be dealt with, but Jacob's sons were left without a spiritual head and took matters into their own vengeful hands.

Chapter 35

V1-4

Chapter 35 is a stark contrast from the previous chapter. God has returned to Jacob and is setting him on the right path. Jacob does three major things which will help him advance in God's plan:

- He leaves the worldly land of Shechem to go where he was supposed to go in the first place
- He will make an altar and resume worshipping God in his life
- He removed the idols from his household so that only God remained

Why would it be necessary to change clothing and earrings?

The culture of the day tied the appearance of a person to their belief system. It would be easy to tell what god someone served simply by looking at them. There were to be no remnants of pagan gods in Jacob's household.

V5-7

Why would God need to protect Jacob on this journey?

In chapter 34, Jacob's family massacred the tribe of Shechem. This would make them a threat to the surrounding houses. Although their own actions caused and even warranted this fear of retribution, God kept Jacob's house safe on their journey. Jacob kept his word of building an altar and returned to the God he had neglected.

V8

Who is Deborah?

This is the only time this nurse of Rebekah is mentioned in the Bible. It is believed that she was a much-loved member of the household of Isaac, but there is no other information regarding her.

V9-15

What is the significance of this conversation with God?

Once Jacob is finally where he is supposed to be, God re-establishes his connection with Jacob. He reminds Jacob of the blessing bestowed upon him through Abraham. He reminds him of his Godly name, Israel. And God reiterates who He is to Jacob so that maybe more reverence will be given to God in the future. Jacob does as he was told at the beginning of the chapter and builds an altar to God.

V16-20

Why does Rachel die in childbirth?

Although it is not clearly stated here, many commentators point back to Genesis 31:32 where Jacob curses whoever stole the household items from Laban, not knowing that it was Rachel who did so. This is just speculation, but a rather significant coincidence if not directly related to the curse.

Jacob is given one last son who was born in the Promised Land by his first love. This could be seen as a sign of what could have been had Jacob followed God in the first place. Instead, his beloved Rachel passes.

V21-29

What is the significance of Reuben having relations with his father's concubine?

The primary reason this is mentioned is that the first three sons of Israel are Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Simeon and Levi have committed atrocities against God by deceiving and massacring the house of Shechem. Now Reuben has sinned against his father and God. This brings the fourth son, Judah, into the picture. He would be the line that the Messiah would come through. Not that the remaining sons were perfect or free from sin, but the first three sons had managed to fall from the grace of God and the family of Jacob by their character.

The twelve sons of Israel are listed. These sons would become the twelve tribes Israel, the Chosen People of God.

The closing of the chapter brings the burial of Isaac. Isaac was supposedly on his deathbed when he intended to give his blessing to Esau. More than twenty years later, Jacob gets to say goodbye to his father. Jacob and Esau, apparently still reconciled despite Jacob's leaving to another land, bury their father together.

Chapter 36

V1-5

Just as Genesis records Jacob's offspring, this section records Esau's descendants.

V6-8

Esau didn't care about his birthright until he realized how much wealth he could have. When he was cheated out of his father's blessing, he felt like he would be poor for the remainder of his life. God still blessed Esau with wealth even if he wasn't to be in the line of the Chosen People and the Messiah.

V9-18

Esau had another name, Edom. This name is seen throughout the Old Testament as the Edomites became neighbors of the region of Jerusalem. The Jews and the Edomites would have an off-again-on-again relationship, but the Edomites would mostly be a pain to the Jews. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied against the Edomites who would eventually fall to the Maccabean Jewish dynasty in 106 BC. Their tiny remnant would join into the fold of the Jews as brothers.

V20-30

This section covers the early descendants of the Edomites.

V31-43

This section covers the leaders of the Edomites through several generations.

Chapter 37

V1-4

Why would Jacob favor Joseph above all his other sons?

Joseph was the first son of Rachel, the woman he first fell in love with. This would give Joseph an edge of favoritism over the sons born from other women. Even Benjamin had a flaw since it is stated that Rachel died giving birth to him. Joseph is the son of Rachel that *didn't* kill Jacob's favored wife.

Not only did Jacob favor Joseph over the others, but he had no problems displaying it. The dysfunctional family traditions continue.

V5-8

Joseph's first dream was an obvious metaphor for he and his siblings. We see here the imperfections of Joseph as his ego got the better of him and he bragged about his dream to his brothers.

V9-11

In an equally obvious metaphor, Joseph's second dream included his father (the sun), his mother (the moon), and his brothers (the 11 stars).

Why is Joseph's mother mentioned here if she has already passed?

It is believed that there are many records in Genesis that are slightly out of chronological order for the purpose of keeping the combined records intact. There are at least two possibilities for "the moon" in this dream. Some scholars believe that this dream may have happened before Benjamin was born and his mother was still alive. That would also make this dream a prediction of the birth of his brother unless his mother was pregnant at the time. Another possibility is that "the moon" represents the household mothers. It is assumed that after Rachel passed that her maidservant would take on the motherly duties left behind. This could be a reference to the maidservant or all of Jacob's remaining wives.

Again, Joseph shows a lack of discretion in verbalizing this dream to his family. His father appeared to be the only one to give any credence to these dreams.

V12-17

Shechem is the place where Joseph's brothers killed the tribe of the person that raped their sister. It is apparently still barren from the massacre and now it is used as a pasture.

If there is any question as to where Joseph's arrogance comes from the answer may be found here. Joseph's brothers were working with the herds. Joseph stayed behind with his father. This kind of favoritism has obviously spoiled Joseph.

V18-22

The jealousy of Joseph's brothers is evident by their new nickname for him.

Reuben is the firstborn son of Jacob and is also the son who committed incest by sleeping with his father's concubine. But Reuben has some redemptive quality as he tries to find a way to save his younger brother. Peer pressure keeps him from simply stating what is wrong to his brothers, but he at least tries to find a way to please everybody. Pleasing everybody is usually impossible.

V23-28

Which is worse, killing their brother or selling him into slavery for profit?

There is a great debate found in this passage. Did Judah try to spare Joseph's life or was he just greedy enough to sell his brother for silver? It is not clearly stated what the intentions of Joseph's brothers are

here. One would hope that Judah, an ancestor of Jesus, would be honorable, but the line of Jesus contains many dishonorable people.

V29-36

It is not stated when Reuben left his brothers, but he was not around when Joseph was sold into slavery. His attempt to satisfy everyone failed miserably.

There seems to be a consensus by the brothers on how to proceed. If they had hoped that their father would show at least one of them favoritism now that Joseph was gone, that hope was dashed as the mourning of Jacob lasted a long time.

The closing of this chapter puts Joseph into slavery in Egypt where his life would only get more interesting.

Chapter 38

V1-5

Judah, the fourth son of Jacob and the ancestor of Jesus, goes out and marries a Canaanite woman and has three sons.

V6-11

This passage is not clear on what Er's offenses were, simply that he was evil. Enough so that God had to intervene. These verses also fail to indicate in what manner Er was killed. The same can be said for Judah's second son, Onan. The Mosaic law had not been established yet, but that law had a precedence on which it was based. Deuteronomy 25:5-10 discusses this sin of Onan and establishes the law dealing with this offense.

The Bible doesn't state if Judah thought poorly of his sons or of Tamar, but he had no desire to take a chance on his last sons' life. He sends Tamar back to her family with a false promise of marrying Shelah when he is old enough.

V12-23

The culture of the day and what would be the status quo of the Jews for ages to come was that Tamar belonged to the house of Judah since she was married to one of his sons. An example of this can be found in the story of Ruth where she marries a relative of her late husband. Tamar could not simply seek another husband. The house of Judah was obligated to provide one for her. When she realized that Judah was going to leave her as a childless widow, she took matters into her own hands.

It is unclear how Tamar knew to set this particular trap for Judah, but it worked. She now had an heir and proof of whom that heir belonged to.

Judah tells Hirah of the transaction and asks him to complete the payment. Apparently, the practice of soliciting a prostitute was common enough for these two men to think nothing of it. It would be today's equivalent of asking someone to pick something up at the store if they're going that way. But Tamar is long gone.

V24-26

This passage is where Judah learns his lesson. He had no intention of providing a third husband for Tamar, but once he finds out she's been unfaithful to his household then retribution must be made. It is then that she reveals to Judah what has been done and he realizes how wrong he has been.

V27-30

Tamar gives birth to twins, Perez and Zerah. Perez is in the line of Jesus weaving this ungodly situation into the heritage of the Messiah.

Chapter 39

The remaining chapters of Genesis are believed to have been recorded by Joseph himself. No other person could have recorded the personal details offered in this account. These chapters were obviously scribed by a family member, possibly the same family member who scribed the previous few chapters even as far back as the account of Abraham's death. This family member would most likely be a brother as he would be able to fill in the gaps concerning the remaining family of Jacob. But the origin of these last chapters were almost certainly straight from Joseph's mouth and recorded for posterity.

V1-6

The previous description of Joseph in chapter 37 is one of a spoiled brat. He has been favored by his father and doesn't seem to have to do as much work as his brothers. Now in slavery, Joseph is having to work to earn the respect and trust of his master. And although he may have been spoiled, it seems he also knows how to put in hard labor. So much so that the captain of the guard for Pharaoh promotes Joseph up through the ranks to a trusted head of household. God not only blesses Joseph during his slavery, but Potiphar also benefits and is blessed.

It should be noted that only three men in all the Bible are described as handsome: David (1 Samuel 16:12), Absalom (2 Samuel 14:25), and here in verse 6 describing Joseph.

V7-18

How does Joseph respond to the advances by Potiphar's wife?

- Joseph displayed great loyalty to his master
- Joseph found ways to avoid being alone with her
- Joseph confronted her directly
- Joseph showed his faithfulness to God

Potiphar's wife was persistent and eventually forceful. Joseph showed great restraint in this situation. His life had been turned upside down. He became a slave. He worked hard to get where he was at. And a consensual relationship with this woman would be discrete as both would be at risk if Potiphar were to find out. Joseph's resistance to this temptation is exemplary. But his faithfulness and loyalty would cost him. His situation was about to take a turn for the worse. The wife put on a convincing display to all that would listen so that her husband would have more than just his wife in his ear concerning this event.

V19-23

What is Potiphar's reaction and what should it have been?

There is a hidden blessing here that is not known unless one has a good grasp of Egyptian culture of the day. It is believed that for a slave to assault the wife of an official would be a capital offense. If Potiphar truly trusted the tale from his wife, he should have killed Joseph. On the other hand, if Potiphar suspected his wife of lying then he should have let Joseph be and punish his wife. Potiphar's wife made a scene so that she had "witnesses" to back her story up putting Potiphar in a difficult situation. Potiphar instead takes the middle ground by not killing Joseph but putting him in prison to satisfy his wife and household.

Just as Joseph worked hard for Potiphar and rose through the ranks, Joseph works hard in prison and finds favor with the warden. And God's blessings on Joseph spill over to the prison just as they did with Potiphar. Joseph is a "good luck charm" to those that he comes in contact with.

Chapter 40

V1-8

There is an easy to miss detail in this passage that sheds some light on Joseph and his predicament. In verse 3, the cupbearer and the cook are placed in the charge of the captain of the guard. The captain of the guard is Potiphar. Potiphar was still watching over Joseph even in prison. He probably suspected his wife of her treachery but there was not much he could do about it. So, he satisfied his wife, household, and reputation while still looking after Joseph in prison. Not that prison was desirable, but Joseph was at least looked favorably upon in this dungeon.

It is not stated what the offenses were of the two highly placed servants of Pharaoh. Whether they deserved their sentence or not is up for debate. But even in prison, Joseph could tell that something is abnormally wrong after these two have their respective dreams.

God communicated with Joseph through dreams, which is what landed him in this current situation. Joseph was not afraid to ask God for the interpretation of dreams.

V9-15

There are some obvious metaphors in the dream of the cupbearer, but Joseph is thorough with his answer to the riddle. He was quick to give the credit for the interpretations to God in verse 8, so this was not his own doing, but God's.

V16-19

Just as God interpreted the dream of the cupbearer, He did so with the chef. It is assumed from this passage that there was some sort of plot against Pharaoh that was discovered. Not knowing who to blame for this plot, Pharaoh threw the two prime suspects into prison until the matter could be investigated. The cupbearer would be found innocent and restored. The chef would be found guilty and executed.

V20-23

The dreams come true just as Joseph interpreted. But the cupbearer does not remember to speak of Joseph to Pharaoh. This is another instance of Joseph being wronged after doing the right thing.

Chapter 41

V1-7

Joseph had been forgotten by the cupbearer for 2 years before Pharaoh has dreams that bother him.

V8-13

The cupbearer remembers his own dream and that of the chef. After all this time of forgetting about Joseph, his memory is jogged.

V14-16

As soon as Pharaoh hears that there is someone who may be capable of interpreting his dreams, he calls for him. Joseph is cleaned up and brought before the highest court of Egypt.

This account of Joseph is what many point to as his golden moment of glorifying God. He could have simply taken the credit for himself. But after all this time in slavery and imprisonment, Joseph still puts God first.

V17-24

Pharaoh recounts his dreams to Joseph with a little more detail than the original telling earlier in the chapter.

V25-36

Read Deuteronomy 19:15. Although the scriptures had not been written yet, they were based on something that happened or had been established previously. Many point to this event as an instance of confirming the law in Deuteronomy.

It is not made clear here how Joseph knew the timing of the fortune and famine of Egypt. Many think it is because the dreams occurred twice and that God was confirming the closeness of the events, not just that they were going to happen. It should also be noted that Joseph had two dreams concerning him being over his entire household and this prediction had not yet come to pass, so that indicates that there may have been another sign of the timing.

Joseph also interprets why the dreams were given to Pharaoh himself. Had any other man received these dreams, very little if anything would have been done about them. But Pharaoh was in a position to act on these dreams. God wanted to spare Egypt. Joseph offers advice based on the dreams and who the dreams were given to.

V37-45

It is interesting to note the recording of the words of Pharaoh is the first time the Bible records the Spirit of God coming over a person.

Joseph began this ordeal 13 years ago as a teenager. He was first thrown into a pit, then became a slave, then thrown in prison. Joseph could have succumbed to Potiphar's wife and lived a life of luxury, or he could have chosen to ignore the two worried officials imprisoned alongside him. Instead, he followed God and tried to do what was right. The rough paths in his life lead him to a grand position.

V46-57

Joseph began a new life at this point. He was in a position of power. He had a wife and children. He gave his children Hebrew names. He used his wisdom and God's dreams for Pharaoh to plan a healthy supply

of food and, in turn, a healthy economy for Egypt. Egypt not only survived the famine, it flourished. The surrounding countries that did not have the foresight of the coming famine found themselves turning to Egypt for help. Joseph became a person of importance in all the lands.

Chapter 42

V1-5

Why would the brothers look at one another in verse 1?

This is not made abundantly clear here, but the literal translation is “to look questioningly one at the other.” Jacob had no way to know this, but every time the brothers heard the name “Egypt” their hearts would sink out of guilt from what they had done to Joseph.

With Joseph gone, Jacob’s affections fell to Benjamin, the other son of Rachel.

V6-17

The Bible gives little indication to Joseph’s state of mind during this conversation with his brothers. It is possible Joseph was being vindictive. However, some scholars believe he was acting in such a way as to guide them into repentance.

The fact that Joseph noticed his brothers at all is somewhat of a miracle. As a high official, Joseph would have overseen the transactions to keep track of money and food supplies, but it is likely that he would rarely be near the actual vendors. He would be more like a manager or an accountant and even then, at a high level. He might have recognized them in passing. It is possible that Joseph directly oversaw all or some of the transactions, but he would not have done this alone. Verse 23 mentions that he spoke through an interpreter so there were more people than just Joseph in this marketplace. Imagine the surprise of the other customers in line to get food as they observed what transpired.

What is significant about the brothers telling Joseph that “one is no more” in verse 13?

The brothers knew they did not kill Joseph, so they either lied to keep up the family’s dirty little secret or they may have assumed that Joseph had died during a life of slavery. They had no way of knowing what happened to Joseph and didn’t realize that it was he standing right in front of them.

V18-24

After letting his brothers stew in prison for three days, he then approaches them with his terms for release.

What is significant about Joseph telling his captives that he fears God in verse 18?

For an Egyptian to not only know the God of Abraham, but fear him, should have been of great comfort to the brothers. Joseph is just starting to reveal his hand.

It isn’t until this passage that we find out that Joseph has been speaking through an interpreter the entire time. He has played the role of Egyptian to his favor. His brothers then begin speaking among themselves in Hebrew which Joseph would obviously be familiar with. Knowing that Joseph was sold into slavery to Egyptian masters and now being right in the heart of Egypt would have raised their own guilt to unconscionable levels. They feel as though their past is catching up with them.

Joseph is overcome with emotion at hearing of their guilt. He knows this scenario must be played through to completion, but it must have been difficult for him to not just reveal himself to his brothers in that moment. Still, he continues the ruse and even carries it further by having Simeon bound right in front of his brothers.

V25-28

It is not clear how many times any of the brothers may have repented of their sin against Joseph over the past decade, but they are certainly trying to repent now. Not only have they been accused of spying but now they can be accused of being thieves. Regardless of how the money got in their bags and whose fault it was, they were the ones holding the bags.

V29-38

The brothers return to their father and explain the situation. Jacob shows a great lack of faith here as he has so done in the past. His reaction is to keep Benjamin and sacrifice Simeon! Instead of seeking and trusting God in such calamity, he tries to hold on to what he has and put his remaining son of Rachel ahead of all else. Reuben even tries to console his father with a blood oath which does nothing to sway the mind of his father.

Chapter 43

V1-10

It is not clear how much time has passed since the brothers returned from Egypt with food, but it has been long enough for that food to disappear. Jacob, in an effort to keep his son Benjamin with him has sacrificed Simeon to the Egyptian dungeon!

Judah tries to convince his father that it is pointless to return to Egypt without Benjamin and offers himself as collateral. It is either return to Egypt or starve.

V11-18

If each of the 10 brothers took enough money to purchase food (whatever price that was) and then that money was doubled, that is 20 units of that price. Joseph was sold into slavery for 20 pieces of silver.

The sons of Jacob did not know what to make of the kindness being shown to them by this unknown Egyptian official. They were nervous and scared.

V19-23

Before Joseph arrives for dinner, the brothers try to explain their situation to the head butler. He assures them that nothing is wrong and even invokes the name of God to comfort them.

Simeon is brought out before Joseph arrives. Simeon probably had some choice words for his brothers who left him to rot in prison.

V24-30

Joseph is showing them kindness in a strange land. Joseph had two dreams where his family bowed down to him. This marks the second occasion that his brothers have done just that.

It is unclear what kind of relationship Joseph and Benjamin had, but both were young, both were favored by their father, and both were of the same mother making them full brothers. Joseph's only memory of Benjamin is of an innocent boy. He never thought he would be reunited with Benjamin.

V31-34

The Egyptians would not eat with a foreigner, even one in a position of power such as Joseph. What is the importance of the Jewish people living in Egypt where the two cultures remain separated?

The land that God wanted the Jews to inhabit was filled with Canaanites and other tribes. These people groups had no problem mingling with each other and letting their cultures spill over to each other. This very principle is what corrupted Jacob and his family, from the raping of Dinah to the unwholesome relationship between Judah and Tamar. God would use the Egyptians to have the Jews flourish but keep their culture separated and pure.

Why give Benjamin the largest helping?

The Bible is not clear on the meaning behind this, but there are several viable possibilities. Joseph may have simply been looking for a reaction from his brothers when the youngest was shown favoritism as he was by his father. This could also be another telltale that Joseph is using to reveal himself to his brothers just as he told them he knew of their God on their first visit. He not only knew their ages and assigned their seating accordingly, but he knew that their youngest was the most favorably treated and why.

Genesis 44

V1-13

What is the point of Joseph's entrapment of his brothers?

On the surface, this passage can be taken as Joseph being vengeful. Although this is not made clear here, most scholars agree that due to Joseph's character and his trust in God that he is testing his brothers to see if they are repentant of their actions. Although the brothers were innocent of this crime, they were guilty of selling Joseph into slavery and lying to their father. Joseph could be using this trap to bring their guilt to the surface.

Does Joseph practice divination?

There is no clear answer to this question. Some note that Joseph simply referred to his cup as "the silver cup." It was the servant that mentioned it was used for divination. Archaeologists know that it was not uncommon for cups or chalices to be used in the practice of divination during this period. It is unknown if Joseph practiced divination or not, although many think it unlikely. If he did, the Levitical law (Leviticus 19:26) was not in effect yet and he would not be subject to it. The servant may have simply been saying this to add importance to the "stolen" object.

The brothers are so confident that none of them stole the cup that they offer their lives if it is found among them. When it is revealed that the cup is with Benjamin's belongings, this is the worst possible scenario for the family coming to fruition right before their eyes.

Although only Benjamin is required to return to the city, all the brothers return in solidarity in their compassion for Benjamin. They were also unified when selling Joseph into slavery, so all of them have matured to some degree.

V14-17

Here, Joseph feigns anger. He also mentions divination, which is still a vague uncertainty since this was obviously a setup and not something he predicted. This exchange between Joseph and his brothers is simply Joseph trying to learn where his brothers' hearts are at.

V18-34

The remainder of this chapter is Judah's speech to Joseph addressing the crime of which Benjamin is accused. There are many points of interest in this speech.

- Judah, although not the oldest, takes charge and humbly addresses this Egyptian official. Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, the three eldest remain silent.
- Many scholars point to this speech as one of the most heartfelt, sincere, and moving speeches in all of scripture.
- Judah shows genuine concern for his father, a father that has shown favoritism to both Joseph and Benjamin over him. Judah has grown past his jealousy.
- There is no lie in this speech. Although Judah mentions the loss of Benjamin's full brother, he does not say that he is dead. He alludes to a possible fate, but he is not certain what became of Joseph.
- Judah offers himself in place of Benjamin. This displays a completely different heart than the one that sold Joseph into slavery.

Genesis 45

V1-8

What is the attitude of Joseph here and why?

This was an emotional moment for Joseph. He has seen his brothers' change in heart and attitude. These are not the same people that threw him in a pit and sold him to slave traders. Joseph is also humbler than he was as an arrogant teenager ready to tell his family about his dreams. Joseph has experienced many hardships at the hands of his brothers, but he has found God through the good and bad. The culmination of all that he had been through was now standing right before him. God used the evil of Joseph's brothers to save the future generations of the Jews.

Why would Joseph have the Egyptians leave the room?

This is not stated in the Bible, but it is Jewish tradition (and one based in some reality) that Joseph may have had to convince his brothers who he was by proving that he was circumcised. Although circumcision was not an unheard-of practice in the land of Abraham, this would be a rarity in Egypt. This is one of the possible reasons the Egyptians despised and separated themselves from the Hebrews.

What is the reaction of Joseph's brothers?

Verse 3 uses the Hebrew word "bahal" which translates roughly to "terrified amazement." They found it hard to believe that Joseph stood in front of them and even more difficult to believe that Joseph would be kind to them.

V9-15

It takes much convincing on the part of Joseph to get his brothers to realize that there is nothing but love in his heart. He includes all his brothers in his joy and leaves none out. His desire to be with his family and his trust in God overwhelms all other feelings of retribution he may have had. Verse 15 says that his brothers were finally convinced and that there was much to talk about.

V16-20

What is the attitude of Pharaoh and why?

Despite the cultural divide between Egyptians and the line of Abraham, Pharaoh recognized that Joseph had saved Egypt. Famines could be taken as a sign of weakness of a leader or king, as a god's disapproval of activity or displeasure with his subjects, or could simply cause upheaval among people which would lead to revolts. Egypt was prepared for this famine and the Pharaoh was held in high regard because of it. Pharaoh owed his kingdom to Joseph and was more than happy to repay Joseph with kindness.

V21-28

Why did Joseph tell his brothers not to become troubled along the way (verse 24)?

The Bible does not say why Joseph showed favoritism to Benjamin, but there are many possible explanations. The most plausible being that Joseph and Benjamin were full brothers. Another possibility is that Benjamin played no role in selling his brother into slavery. Whatever the reason, he wanted to make sure that all his brothers were content with what they were given. The temptation to covet this much wealth, especially in a time of famine, could become overpowering. Joseph was reminding them of where they were at and how far they had come.

What is Jacob's reaction to the news of his son Joseph being alive?

Pharaoh and the Egyptians had reasons for their cultural snobbishness. Egypt was the shining jewel in this era. For the sons of Jacob to come home with Egyptian goods would be the equivalent of a merchant marine returning home with Italian sports cars, Tiffany furniture, and Rolex watches. As wealthy as Jacob and his family were, the quality and amount of Egyptian goods would be impressive. Jacob had been lied to about his son Joseph for so long that he had no reason to believe otherwise. It took all his sons and the quality merchandise from Egypt to convince him that Joseph was still alive.

Genesis 46

V1-7

Beersheba is at the southern edge of Canaan on the way to Egypt. Jacob wanted to worship God in the Promised Land before leaving it to go to Egypt. This is where God reassures Jacob that He is in control. Jacob will live the remainder of his life in Egypt.

V8-27

This is what can be described as a "census" of the family of Jacob. This family of 70 would spend the next 400 years becoming a people of over 2 million.

V28-34

The closing of this chapter tells of an emotional reunion between father and son. Neither of them expected to ever see the other again. And here they were, together as a family in a foreign land.

Joseph had made provisions for his family to live in Goshen. The Egyptians, for all their wealth and culture, did not appreciate the occupation of rancher or shepherd. This would carry over even into the time of Jesus when being a shepherd was considered a lowly position. Between their being non-Egyptian and their chosen occupation, this would provide the family of Joseph some privacy in their new country and allow them to live as God wanted them to: separate from the world.

Genesis 47

V1-6

Pharaoh is being grateful to Joseph and his family, but he is also being smart. If Joseph is any indication, then maybe some of that same wisdom and fortune could be found in the rest of Joseph's family. Pharaoh is putting Joseph's family in charge of the livestock of the kingdom.

V7-12

Joseph's father is presented to Pharaoh.

What are the implications of Jacob blessing Pharaoh?

It is well established historically and even archaeologically that the king of Egypt, the Pharaoh, was the embodiment of Ra the sun god. For a mere man to provide a blessing to Pharaoh in the name of the God of Abraham could be taken as an insult, no matter how good the intentions of Jacob. However, Joseph had already established himself as a follower of God when he translated the dreams for Pharaoh. The fact that those dreams came true is a testament to the God of Joseph and Jacob. It is not stated what Pharaoh was thinking at this point, but he was willing to allow the God of Joseph to continue to work in the land of Egypt considering the results that he had witnessed.

Pharaoh grants the best land in Egypt to the family of Jacob and Joseph, a good sign that no insult was perceived by the blessing from Jacob.

V13-26

Although Pharaoh and the kingdom of Egypt had prepared for the famine, the people in both Egypt and the surrounding regions had not. This is an account of the growth of Egypt and how they became the "superpower" of the Old Testament age.

As the people ran out of money to buy food, they looked for other means to purchase sustenance. Joseph allowed the trade of livestock for food which grew the herds of Egypt. Eventually, many areas ran out of things to barter with, and land became the only commodity available. Egypt grew in geographical size. The people were allowed to live and farm on the land, but they had to pay a 20% tax to Egypt for being able to do so.

Although it is historically difficult to prove that this is the reason for Egypt becoming the powerhouse of the ancient world, there is no doubt that Egypt was a force to be reckoned with. They would not suffer a major defeat in battle for many centuries, not until Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took over the middle eastern region in the 600-550 BC era.

V27-31

Jacob is growing old and is on his deathbed. He did get to see his favorite son again and he knew that his family was safe and would be cared for. He got to see the promise of God come to fruition. His last wish is to be buried in the land of his forefathers.

Genesis 48

V1-4

Joseph visits his father in his final moments. Jacob recounts to Joseph God's promise to him.

Luz is another name for Bethel (see Genesis 35).

V5-7

Why adopt Ephraim and Manasseh as sons?

Reuben and Simeon were the first born of Jacob, but their sins had left them in less than favorable conditions. It is speculated that Jacob wished to give Joseph's sons the positions of Reuben and Simeon.

The Bible sometimes records the 12 tribes in different combinations based on this adoption. Joseph was the father of one tribe, but his two sons being adopted by Jacob put Ephraim and Manasseh in tribal head positions. These records are not contradictions, simply different ways of referring to the tribe of Joseph. It is possible that the different methods of referring to the tribes of Israel has sparked the legend of the "13th tribe" even into modern culture.

V8-20

Why bless the youngest son over the eldest?

The Bible does not clearly state a reason and there is much debate as to Jacob's actual purpose, but it is possible that Jacob is passing along the blessing to the youngest son just as his father did to him (despite all the treachery surrounding this act). It is not made clear if Joseph knew of his fathers' ordeal with his brother Esau, but it is obvious that Joseph does not appreciate the elder blessing going to the younger son.

V21-22

The blessing Jacob gives to Joseph is two-fold here. Since Joseph's sons are now adopted by Jacob, Joseph has 2 tribes of the chosen people. These 2 tribes would inherit the land of the Amorites which Jacob took while living in Canaan, although this is not recorded in the Bible. There are Jewish texts that discuss this further, the Jewish Midrash and the Book of Jubilees 34.

Genesis 49

V1-2: Jacob's Blessings for his sons

After Jacob had adopted and blessed the sons of Joseph (previous chapter), Jacob has all his sons come before him for a final, death-bed blessing. Many scholars point out that some of these are not so much blessings as much as prophecies concerning each line.

It should be noted that the blessings do not proceed in the birth order. After Judah, the fourth born, Jacob skips around some. This is probably because the first 6 sons mentioned are all the sons of Leah,

although still out of birth order. It is possible that this may have been the way the sons surrounded Jacob's bed, but it is not made clear.

V3-4: Reuben

Reuben not receiving his fathers' blessing is significant in a number of ways. Just like Esau did not receive the first-born inheritance and just as Jacob blessed the younger son of Joseph over the eldest, Reuben would be passed over. The tribe of Reuben is considered one of the most inconsequential tribes of the Jews in all the Bible.

The first-born not only received a double portion of the inheritance, but they were expected to be the spiritual and social leader of the family. The chief inheritance, the priesthood, and the ruling authority would all be divided among the other brothers.

V5-7: Simeon and Levi

Although the "blessing" of Simeon and Levi are combined in this passage, their fates are different. The tribe of Simeon was numerically the smallest and eventually shared the land of Judah after the exodus. The "dividing and scattering" came true for the Levites as they assumed the priesthood and their tribe was to dwell among the others, never owning their own land.

V8-12: Judah

Judah received the first true blessing not because he was perfect, but because he had grown in ways that his brothers had not, even going so far as to offer himself in place of his brothers when they were in fear of being imprisoned. His character was the most improved and he showed himself to be worthy of the head of his family in the eyes of Jacob. The future kings of the Jews would come mostly from this line. The Messiah would also come from this line.

Some translations use the name "Shiloh" in verse 10. The name Shiloh means "He whose right it is" and is often used in the Old Testament to refer to the coming Messiah.

The phrase "binding his donkey to the vine" indicates that the line of Judah would be well-off. Indeed, they were known for their material abundance and the land of Judah was considered excellent wine-growing country.

V13: Zebulun

The tribe of Zebulun settled the land sitting between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. Zebulun's tribe was noted for their faithfulness to David and provided more soldiers to David's army than any other tribe.

V14-15: Issachar

The tribe of Issachar was a large tribe, third in size according to Numbers 26. However, they were often defeated in battle and ended up slaves to foreign nations on several occasions.

V16-18: Dan

It is not clear what the blessing intends for the tribe of Dan, but it should be noted that one of the most prominent judges, Samson, comes from this line.

What does the term, "a viper by the path" mean?

This is a vague phrase without a clear definition, but the tribe of Dan tended to be troublesome in the line of Jews. Idolatry was introduced by them (Judges 18:30), a golden calf was setup in Dan (1 Kings 12:26-30), and Dan became a center of idol worship in Israel (Amos 8:14). Some think that this phrase indicates that the antichrist will descend from this line. Dan is the only tribe to be left out of the listed tribes in Revelation 7:5-8.

What does the phrase, "I have waited for your salvation, O Lord!" mean in verse 18?

There is apparently a split here between the blessings. Jacob is crying out as he draws closer to death. The Hebrew word "yeshuwah" is used here, meaning salvation. This is the name of Jesus.

V19: Gad

Although Zebulun supplied the most soldiers to King David, the men of Gad were said to be the strongest and best warriors, the least of which was equal to 100 other men (1 Chronicles 12:14). Even so, their armies would suffer defeats, including against the Babylonians (Jeremiah 49:1).

V20: Asher

There is little mention of the tribe of Asher, but it is said that the land of Asher produced many goods and luxuries. Moses calls the tribe of Asher the most blessed among the tribes (Deuteronomy 33:24).

V21: Naphtali

This blessing is vague, and little is known of the tribe of Naphtali. Most point to Matthew 4:12-16 as a fulfillment of this blessing. Jesus could often be found in the land of Naphtali near the Sea of Galilee teaching the people.

V22-26: Joseph

It is little surprise that the longest blessing belongs to Joseph. Despite the trials and tribulations in Joseph's life, he prospered and paved the way for his family to thrive, all through the guiding hands of God.

What does Jacob mean in verse 26 when he says, "The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors?"

Jacob was known to be a conman and a trickster. He had been treated poorly by his uncle and in turn trusted no one because neither he nor his uncle were trustworthy. He was selfish and not much of a patriarch, favoring his youngest sons over all others. Yet God still blessed him. Jacob was blessed because of the grace of God. He did not fully realize this until his old age.

V27-28: Benjamin

The tribe of Benjamin has a reputation throughout the Old Testament of being a fierce and even cruel people. Ehud (Judges 3:15-23), Saul (1 Samuel 9:1), and even the Apostle Paul (Romans 11:1) come from the line of Benjamin.

All 12 tribes were blessed by Jacob and all 12 made it out of Egypt. Some were obviously more blessed than others but the fact that an estimated 2 million plus Jews left Egypt some 400 years later is a testament to this blessing.

V29-33

Even though Jacob had already charged Joseph with this final wish (Genesis 47:27-31), he now commands all his sons to ensure that he is buried in his homeland.

The phrase, “gathered to my people” is used twice in this passage. What does Jacob mean by this?

This could simply refer to him dying and being buried with his family, but the language and cultural traditions indicate something else. Jacob knew he would be with his family in the presence of God. He was not afraid of death. He was looking forward to it.

Genesis 50

V1-13

It is interesting to note that the Egyptians treated the death of Jacob with great honor and respect. An Egyptian royal mourning period was 72 days. Jacob was treated as near-royalty. Whether this treatment was due to the actions of Joseph or that the Egyptians came to know Jacob well during the remainder of his life is unclear. It is often noted that nowhere else in the Bible is a burial recorded with such honor and in such detail. Jacob’s body was treated in the Egyptian tradition of embalming and then buried in the land of his fathers in the tomb of Abraham.

V14-21

This passage has an important aspect to it which ties in with the previous patriarchs. The brothers are afraid that with their father gone that Joseph will now pass judgement on them for the way they treated him. They even go so far as to make up a story about their dead father’s wishes of forgiveness. Joseph knows that the history of this family is plagued with doubt, deceit, and dishonor. He immediately quells his brothers’ fear with mercy. He has no desire to continue the family trend with retribution and vengeance.

Joseph has grown closer to God over the past decades, and he sees how the evil of man can be used for the good of God. This passage is often misused to show that doing the will of God will reward you in the end with wealth and comfort. This is only partially correct. Doing right by God will reward you in the end with an eternity of God’s glory not seen here on earth. It does not mean an earthly life of wealth or comfort.

V22-26

Here Jacob states that eventually this family will find its way back to Canaan, the land that God promised them. Even in his wealth, stature, and long-life Jacob realized that his home was where God said it would be, not in Egypt.

What is significant about the phrasing of the final verse of Genesis?

Although Joseph died, was embalmed, and was placed in a coffin, he was not *buried*. Jewish tradition holds that Joseph’s coffin was on display for all to see in Egypt until Moses carried it back to Canaan in Exodus 13:19 some 400 years later.

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