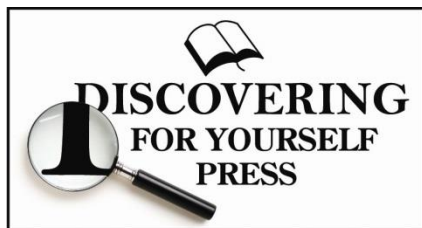


Genesis

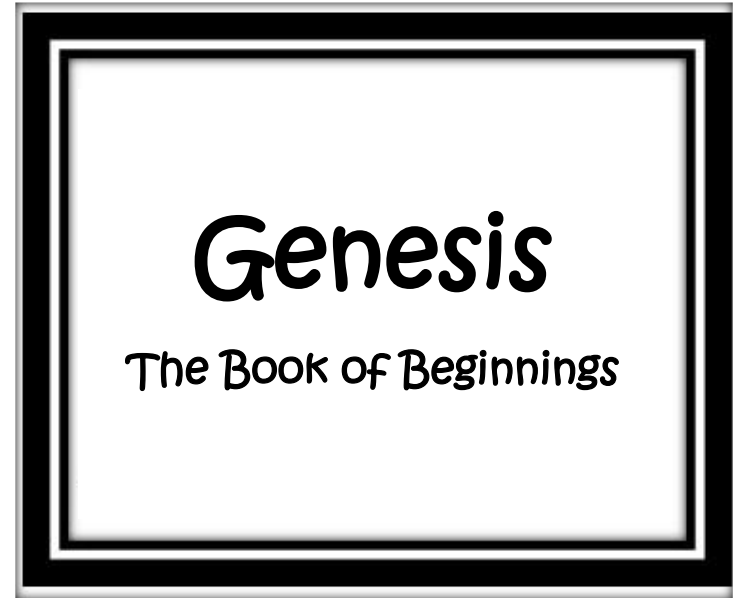
The Book of Beginnings



Moline, IL
www.d4yp.com

Notes and Comments by John Sullivan

This journal belongs to:



Notes and Comments by John Sullivan

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

Genesis 1:27

Genesis

The Book of Beginnings

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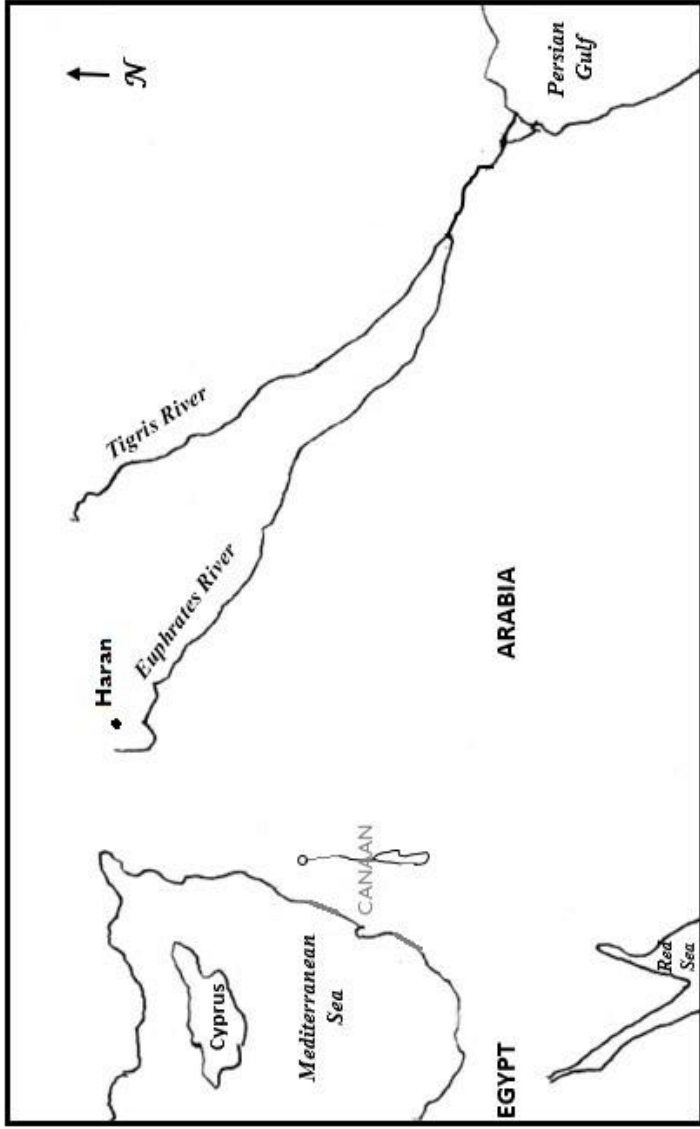


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Notes

Table of Contents

Week	Topic	Page
	Map	i
	Introduction	ii
1	Genesis 1 – 2 "God the Creator and His Image Bearers"	1
2	Genesis 3 – 5 "God the Savior and His Plan for Sinners"	4
3	Genesis 6 – 11 "God the Patient Judge"	8
4	Genesis 12 – 15 "God the Promiser and the Great Promise Keeper"	11
5	Genesis 16 – 20 "God Almighty"	14
6	Genesis 21 – 25 "God the Tester and the Provider"	17
7	Genesis 26 – 32 "God's Use of Flawed People(1)"	20
8	Genesis 33 – 38 "God's Use of Flawed People(2)"	23
9	Genesis 39 – 50 "God's Presence and Providence"	26
	Conclusion	29
	Additional Studies	30
	Additional Study #1 "Science and Creation"	31
	Additional Study #2 "Tough Bible Questions"	31
	Additional Study #3 "Peter's Commentary about the Flood"	32
	Additional Study #4 "God's Patience"	32
	Additional Study #5 "Names for God"	33
	Additional Study #6 "Covenants"	34
	Additional Study #7 "Melchizedek"	35
	Additional Study #8 "Faith Credited as Righteousness"	35
	Additional Study #9 "Abraham's Faith"	36
	Additional Study #10 "Tests"	36
	Additional Study #11 "God's Choices"	37
	Additional Study #12 "The Heart and Strategy for Memorizing Scriptures"	37
	Resources	39



The Geography of Genesis

(A few select cities and regions are labelled here. You can add more as you go through Genesis.)

Notes

Resources

Alexander, David and Pat *Erdmans' Handbook of the Bible*, Lion Publishing, 1973

Halley, Henry *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Zondervan, 2000.

Hamilton, Mark (editor) *The Transforming Word*, Abilene Christian University Press, 2009.

Websites and Apps:

www.biblegateway.com A free online, searchable tool with the Bible in multitudes of translations and languages, along with many other Bible-study aids.

www.doesgodexist.org Devoted to providing thought-provoking evidence that the Bible is God's word and that true science and belief in God are compatible.

www.gotquestions.org A searchable tool designed to try to give reasonable answers to Bible questions. Just type in the question and see what you think about their answer.

YouVersion Bible App A free download of the Bible in many versions to make the Word of God available on your phone or other devices.

Genesis

The Book of Beginnings

Introduction

God makes it clear that he wants us to know the Scriptures and know him. (See **Matthew 22:29, John 5:39-40, John 17:3, Ephesians 1:17**, for instance.) The real point of knowing the Bible is to know God.

In *Genesis*, which literally means “*beginning*”, we see the beginning of God’s revelation of himself to us, the beginning of his creation as we know it, the beginning of the human race at its best and at its worst, the beginning of family, the beginnings of God’s chosen people, and the beginning of God’s covenants with mankind. Let’s set our minds to know as much as we can about this part of God’s Word, but let’s also give all of our heart to know God better as he reveals himself in these Scriptures.

You may have some areas that need a new beginning. As you study these Scriptures, focus on the Creator God and his ability to work with and through people (even flawed people) to accomplish his flawless will. Hopefully, that will inspire you to see how he can work with and through you as well.

The nine sections of this journal could be used as a 9-week study of this part of the Bible, but the pace is flexible and can easily be adjusted to a faster or slower pace.

The twelve Additional Studies at the end of the journal can be done at any time. For instance, there are several times in the journal that memorizing a Scripture is recommended. The twelfth Additional Study is called “*The Heart and Strategy for Memorizing Scriptures*.”

This journal is not designed to be a detailed commentary on each verse, but it is set up in a way that will hopefully help you know your Bible and know your God better. We don't want to study the Bible just to get knowledge and not grow in our love for God. The journal with its comments and thought questions will hopefully help you study the Scriptures in an organized way, pray, and think about what you learn about God and about being his people that you can apply to your life. But the journal is the side dish, at best. The main ingredient is God's Word itself. So, first read the Scriptures before reading this journal. As a result of your study, you will also have much to share with others. If you do this study with a group, the thought questions can be used for some of your group discussions.

May God bless you to continue to know His Word and know Him better!

John Sullivan
September 2017

Week 1

Genesis 1 – 2
Genesis 1 – 2

God the Creator and His Image Bearers

NOTE: Each week of this 9-week journal will have 5 subsections, with the idea in mind that you could spend one day on each subsection. But, as was stated in the introduction, obviously go at whatever pace fits you.

In the very first verse of the Bible, God simply and profoundly reveals Himself as the Creator. Just so that we don't take the word "created" for granted, think for a moment about what this verse is implying about God when it says that he created (i.e. brought into existence from nothing) the whole universe. **Genesis 1:1 – 2:3** is sometimes referred to as the *Creation Hymn*. We start with three of the many characteristics of our amazing Creator that are found there. Then, we will look at what he reveals about us as his creation.

1. God's Creative Power

(Re-read the *Creation Hymn* from *Genesis 1:1 – 2:3*.)

Here is a fairly simple, but profound question: How big is the universe?

The **enormity** of the universe, let alone its other amazing features, tells you about the creative powers of the God who spoke all that into existence. This is the powerful Creator-God that we get to pray to and praise for his amazing power. Live today in awe of the amazing Creator.

You might want to read **Psalms 121** to get inspired by the fact that the "Maker of heaven and earth" (a phrase also mentioned in **Psalms 124:8, 134:3, and 146:6**) is the One watching over you. How great is that? What was it, again, that you were so worried about?

This also might be a good time to think of songs like "How Great is Our God." Those aren't just words in a song book; they are the reality.

2. God's Creative Intelligence

(Re-read the *Creation Hymn* from *Genesis 1:1 – 2:3*.)

While the enormity of God's creation speaks to his power, the perfection and complexity of it speaks to his intelligence. Consider, for instance, the plant and animal world that God created on this earth. To say the least, there is tremendous variety and yet perfect harmony among that part of his creation. Every piece of his creation works together for the benefit of the whole system.

(The Heart and Strategy for Memorizing Scripture, continued)



Strategy for Memorizing Scripture

1. **Read it.** Out loud. Take the Scripture that you want to memorize and analyze it thoroughly and prayerfully. Ask God to teach you what he wants you to know and why he wants you to know it. See **Colossians 3:16**. Don't just read it; meditate on it. While there is more to do than just reading it, you may find that reading and meditating on it every day for a week can often automatically result in memorizing it.
2. **Write it.** Write it down on a card in your own hand writing. Read it out loud, and practice it during the day. The next day, repeat the process – write the whole thing again.
3. **Speak it.** Out loud. Incorporate the passage into your prayer. For instance, as you repeat from memory one point of the passage, ask God to help you remember it, obey it personally, and show you how you can teach it to others. If possible, go for a prayer walk as you repeat out loud what you have memorized.
4. **Obey it.** Scripture is, of course, meant to be believed and obeyed, not just memorized. See **James 1:22 – 25**.
5. **Share it.** It's yours only if you can share it.

Reading; Writing; Speaking; Action

These all contribute to the long-term memory of the passage.

NOTE: Please keep in mind when you see these or similar suggestions that they are just that: suggestions. God does not give us details about how to memorize Scripture. So use these suggestions only as they make sense to you in your walk with God.

For more ideas, see also: <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2013/03/ten-tips-for-memorizing-bible-verses/>

**Additional
Study #11**

God's Choices

Romans 9:6 – 24 has a deeper explanation of God choosing Jacob over Esau.

That passage also mentions God's choosing Isaac over Ishmael. The principle found there is a little difficult to grasp totally, but the idea presented there is that God has the right to choose as he pleases. It's another one of those instances where we can trust God that he knew what was best and that he had the wisdom as well as the right to choose.

As you have time, study that passage and think about what it says.

**Additional
Study #12**

The Heart and Strategy for Memorizing Scripture

Memorizing Scripture is one of the most practical tools for helping us in our desire to get to know the Bible better and getting to know God better. It is also a tool for which it is very important that we have the right heart as well as useful strategies.

The Heart for Memorizing Scripture



Read and meditate on the following:

- **Psalm 1:1 – 3**
- **Psalm 19:7 – 14**
- **Psalm 119:9, 11, 18**
- **Jeremiah 20:9**
- **2 Timothy 3:16 – 17**
- **Hebrews 4:12 – 13**
- **James 1:22 – 25.**

Do not give up until the principles of these passages are genuinely felt in your heart. Don't overlook or underestimate this point. After you meditate on these thoughts, answer the following question from your heart:

Why do I want to memorize Scripture?

The **variety** and yet the **harmony** of the plant and animal world, along with so many other aspects of God's creation, tell you about the Creator's intelligence. If he has that much wisdom, what does that do for your faith to trust him today for the needs in your own life?

As stated above, this is the amazing Creator we get to pray to and praise for his unrivaled intelligence.

3. **God's Creative Artistic Beauty**

(Re-read the *Creation Hymn* from *Genesis 1:1 – 2:3*.)

We have seen how amazingly powerful the Creator must be to bring the whole universe into existence and how incredibly intelligent he is to put together the ecological systems of the plant and animal world. Now focus on God's creative artistic beauty. This is certainly a beautiful creation that he has made, isn't it? Go outside and look at the beauty he has made.

Power and intelligence on the level of God's character can be a little intimidating. But think about what the **artistic beauty** of the creation tells you about God, and how that makes you admire and love him even more.

Would you agree or disagree with the following statement?

All nature points to a powerful, intelligent, and artistic designer!

Verse 2 of the Bible says that the earth started out formless, empty and dark. In the rest of the *Creation Hymn*, God tells us how he replaced that formlessness with an intelligent, artistic design and how he replaced that emptiness with a harmonious creation. All of that started with his statement in verse 3: "*Let there be light.*" And he replaced that darkness with light!

(For a brief study on Science and the Bible, see the Additional Study #1 on p. 31.)

4. **The Creator's Image Bearers (Genesis 1:26 – 31)**

As we have seen, God as the creator of the universe is totally amazing in all aspects: his enormous vastness, his ingenuity, his harmony, his artistic beauty. And you could certainly add more thoughts than those four to your appreciation of God when you look at his creation. Now, let's look at two amazing aspects of the human part of God's creation.

- First of all, we are, and certainly should be, amazed by just looking at the human body from a scientific point of view. It is a constant source of wonder. When you look at the complexity of the human body that he created, that again tells you a lot about God and his creative powers. Think about what that does for your faith.

(continued on the next page)

- But there is another point of this Scripture. In God's own words (not ours), humans are the only created beings that are described as being made in God's own image. We are created to be God's image bearers. Perhaps this should gain our attention even more than the amazing complexity of the physical body. As you think about being made in God's image, what does that tell you about your purpose in life?

5. *The Loving Creator and His Image Bearers!*

In some ways, that might be a summary of all of God's Word. It's all about the loving Creator and his image bearers. Meditate about your awe of God the Creator and the joy you have from being made in his image. Let's never lose our sense of awe and joy about that!

Thought Questions

1. Thinking about the way God brought light into the darkness, read what Paul said in **2 Corinthians 4:6**. In what way does the transformation from the original formless, empty and dark world compare to what God has done in your own life?
2. Read **Psalm 149:2 – 5**. We, as the created image bearers, should take great delight in our Maker. And here is the mind-blowing thought: the Maker takes delight in us, his image bearers. What can you do to make sure you do not lose the joy that this psalm describes?
3. What stands out to you about the attributes of God that are seen in the fact that He made the garden paradise described at the end of chapter 2?

Notes

Additional Study #9

Abraham's Faith

The previous study mentioned the fact that Abraham's faith was credited as righteousness. But much more is said in the Bible about Abraham's faith. Read, for instance, **Romans 4:18 – 25**. What comes to your mind, when you see the following phrases:

- “*Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed ...*” (verse 18)
- “*Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead ...*” (verse 19)
- “*Being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he promised ...*” (verse 21)
- “*But also for us ...*” (verse 24)

We can see from verse 24 that Abraham and Sarah's story of faith is not only about them. It is for us also. When we face the facts that the odds are against us, but we trust that God will do what he promised, then our faith is also credited to us as righteousness. Note, however, that the last sentence of this passage makes it clear that we are not talking about just getting our personal requests answered. We are talking about believing in God to do what he has specifically promised – one of those precious promises being our salvation.

Additional Study #10

Tests

Everyone loves a test, right? See what God says about that in passages like **Proverbs 17:3** and **1 Peter 1:6 – 9**. While we may not always love being tested, there is one thing we can all count on: we will be tested. Why do you think God tests our faith?

Hopefully, we get to the point of understanding that testing is a good thing. Not a bad thing, a good thing. There is a reason for it. Of course, “*No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*” (**Hebrews 12:11**) It may take some time before we agree with the “peace” mentioned here, but experience teaches us to not panic every time our faith is tested. When we realize that the test will produce a good result, we start looking for that result when the test comes.

See also the longer study on Tests found at www.d4yp.com

**Additional
Study #7**

Melchizedek

We read about Abram's meeting with the man named Melchizedek in **Genesis 14:18 – 20**. Here's all we know about him from that passage:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• He was the king of Salem• He was a priest of God Most High (<i>El Elyon</i>). | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• He blessed Abram.• He recognized God as Creator.• Abram gave him a tenth. |
|--|---|

Very little else is said about this man and this meeting in the rest of the Bible, so at first glance none of this seems to be all that important.

He is never mentioned again until you read David's prophecy about the Messiah in **Psalms 110:4** where we are told that the coming LORD would be a priest in the "Order" (pattern, style, regulations) of Melchizedek.

That is also never mentioned again until you get to **Hebrews 5 – 7** which refers to Melchizedek 8 times. That's where we get the picture that there is more to the original story than appears at first. As you have time, study **Hebrews 7**, which gives detailed information about why Jesus is a Priest in the Order of Melchizedek, not in the Order of Aaron. It's not the easiest reading in the Bible, but it shows how God carefully planned all of this out, leading up to his Son as our Great High Priest.

**Additional
Study #8**

Faith Credited as Righteousness

What we first read in **Genesis 15:6** about Abraham's faith being credited to him as righteousness is quoted four times in the New Testament.

- **Romans 4:3, 22** The context for the two times that this phrase is mentioned in this chapter emphasizes that our good works will not earn righteousness.
- **Galatians 3:6** The same emphasis as the passage above.
- **James 2:23** The context of this chapter brings a balance to the subject of faith and good works, emphasizing that faith without any works is useless.

These passages show us the important principle of how much we need God's grace. No matter how many good works we do, there will always be a shortage in the "righteousness column." That's where God looks at our faith and credits it to us as righteousness. As James points out, that does not excuse us from doing good works, but it is clear that they do not earn our righteousness.

Week 2

Genesis 3 – 5

God the Savior and His Plan for Sinners

Temptation and sin entered God's perfect creation. The forbidden tree (3:6) looked good for food, pleased the eye, and fed the desire for getting wisdom. (Compare with **1 John 2:16** to see how it relates to temptations today.)

1. The effects of sin (*Genesis 3*)

Meditate about what is said in Chapter 3 and about what you know from your own experiences about the effects of sin.

- Sin (Adam and Eve's sin and ours) obviously hurts other people.
- Sin (Adam and Eve's sin and ours) also brings incredible hurt on the person who sins.
- Sin (Adam and Eve's sin and ours) brings unthinkable pain to our Creator.

The goal of these thoughts is not to discourage us, but to remind us of the consequences of sin, so that we will take temptation even more seriously. It has been said that people often fall into two categories in the area of temptation and sin:

- the **accused consciences** who easily see their guilt and shame but rarely see the positive;
- the **deceived consciences** who always look for the positive but have difficulty seeing the seriousness about their own sins.

Which one describes you? Meditate and pray for an awareness today of your character, of temptations when they come, and how to overcome them.

2. The Tempter

Throughout the Bible, the tempter is commonly referred to as either *Satan* or the *Devil*. Notice the simple meanings of both of those words and how they reveal his character and his work.

Satan – enemy
Devil – accuser

From these definitions alone, what seems to be the focus of his work?

(continued on the next page)

You can see what Satan did on that day in the garden and how he does the same things today.

- He questioned God's word (3:1).
- He contradicted God's word (3:4).
- He deceived Eve.

Know your enemy! Because of God's revelation to us, we are not ignorant of Satan's schemes (**2 Corinthians 2:11**). In **John 8:44**, Jesus said that Satan is the father of lies, and, in fact, lying is his native language. Meditate and pray for an awareness today of Satan's schemes and how to recognize his lies.

3. *Shame, Fear, Hiding, and Blame-Shifting*

Recall the original condition of mankind (**Genesis 2:25**) in the Garden of Eden. After their sin, their eyes were opened and the first thing they seemed to feel was guilt and shame (3:7). Can you relate to that?

Adam and Eve attempted to deal with their guilt and shame by:

- Hiding from God (3:8)
- Shifting the blame to others (3:12 – 13)

Can you also relate to that?

And, of course, hiding from God and blaming others really help to make you feel better about your guilt, right? They do a great job in dealing with your guilt and shame, right? Of course not! But reading this story makes us aware of why we do it. It's been done since the beginning!

Instead of trying to hide our sin from God (which is a pretty useless activity, isn't it?) or trying to shift the blame to others, God's Word throughout the rest of the Bible extols the virtues of admitting our sin (confession) and taking ownership of our sin. Meditate about your plan to make those principles a common practice in your life, and pray to your Creator for his help.

4. *The Promise of the Savior*

Genesis 3:15 is God's first recorded revelation, although limited in detail at that moment, about the role his Son would have in dealing with sin. God told Satan that a descendant of Eve would crush his head, while Satan would strike at his heel.

The original readers of this Scripture might not have understood much of what that meant. But God revealed more and more details about the promise of his Son in the rest of the Old Testament, climaxed by such New Testament Scriptures as **1 John 3:8**,

"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."

Meditate about both the impressive wisdom and love of God in providing his Son as our Savior and the personal impact of that on your life.

(Names for God, continued)

16.	<i>Yahweh-Shalom</i> Judges 6:24	<i>The LORD Our Peace</i>	The name used by Gideon.
17.	<i>Yahweh-Tsidkenu</i> Jer. 33:16	<i>The LORD Our Righteousness</i>	God alone can provide us with righteousness.

Additional Study #6

Covenants

The word "*covenant*" has a wide usage in the Bible. It can mean a two-sided agreement between equal parties (such as a marriage covenant or a business agreement). Or, in the case of our covenant with God, it is a promise from a superior being and a pledge of loyalty from us.

The most frequently referred to covenants are the one given through Moses and the one given through Jesus. This is where we get the phrases "Old Testament" and "New Testament." But **Genesis** refers to covenants, prior to Moses, between God and people. Here are three:

Covenant	Scripture
Between God and Adam	Genesis 1:28 – 30 and 2:15 – 17
Between God and Noah (and us)	Genesis 9:8 – 17
Between God and Abraham	Genesis 17

One phrase that is frequently used in both the Old and New Testaments to summarize our covenant agreement with God is: "*I will be your God; you will be my people.*" He promises to be the God of our life, and we promise to be devoted to him. Here is a partial list of Scriptures with that phrase:

Exod. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 31:33; 32:38; Ezek. 37:23, 27; Zech. 8:8; 13:9; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10; Rev. 21:3

Most covenants had a sign that sealed the agreement and was used as a reminder of the agreement. For instance, a ring is often used today in marriage covenants. The rainbow was the sign of the covenant given at the time of Noah. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant given to Abraham. The blood of animal sacrifices was the sign of the covenant given through Moses. And the blood of Jesus is the sign of the covenant given through Him. Every time we take communion, we are reminded of our covenant relationship with God.

He is our God; we are His people!

Names for God

	Hebrew Words and Scriptures	English Translation	Notes
1.	<i>El, Elah, or Elohim</i> Gen. 1:1	<i>God</i>	Plural in form, but singular in its usage. Often used in compound words: Bethel (house of God); Israel (wrestles with God); Ezekiel (strengthened by God); Daniel (judged by God); Joel (the Lord is God)
2.	<i>YHWH (Yahweh)</i> Gen 2:4 Exod. 34:6	<i>LORD (KJV "Jehovah")</i>	This word would not be spoken out loud, so the vowels were left off when written. See an explanation of the way it is written in the Preface to the New International Version.
3.	<i>Adonai</i>	<i>Lord, Sovereign</i>	This use of the word Lord could also be in lower case to refer to any lord or sovereign.
4.	<i>Adonai Yahweh</i> Gen. 15:2	<i>Sovereign LORD</i>	Combination of first and third names.
5.	<i>El Elyon</i> Gen. 14:18, 22	<i>God Most High</i>	<i>Elyon</i> means <i>the highest</i> . Melchizedek and Abraham used this name.
6.	<i>El Roi</i> Gen. 16:13	<i>The God Who Sees Me</i>	Hagar's name for God, alone in the wilderness.
7.	<i>El Shaddai</i> Gen. 17:1	<i>God Almighty</i>	<i>Shaddai</i> could be translated as " <i>All-sufficient</i> ".
8.	<i>El Olam</i> Gen. 21:33	<i>Eternal God</i>	<i>Olam</i> expresses the eternal duration of God.
9.	<i>Yahweh-Jirah</i> Gen. 22:14	<i>The LORD Will Provide</i>	This name was used by Abraham at the time he was willing to sacrifice Isaac.
10.	<i>El Gibbor</i> Isa. 9:6 – 7	<i>Mighty God</i>	All powerful.
11.	<i>Yahweh-Elohim</i> Gen. 2:4	<i>LORD God</i>	Combination of the first two names.
12.	<i>Yahweh-Raphi</i> Exod. 15:26	<i>The LORD Who Heals</i>	The encouraging name God used for Himself as the Israelites were coming out of Egypt.
13.	<i>Yahweh-Nissi</i> Exod. 17:15	<i>The LORD Our Banner</i>	Moses' name for God after his hands had been lifted up during the victorious battle.
14.	<i>Yahweh-M'Kaddesh</i> Lev. 20:8	<i>The LORD Who Makes Holy</i>	He is the One who sanctifies, or sets apart.
15.	<i>Yahweh-Sabaoth</i> 1 Sam. 1:3	<i>The LORD Almighty or LORD of Hosts</i>	<i>Sabaoth</i> means <i>hosts</i> , referring to troops, such as the <i>Heavenly Hosts</i> .

(continued on the next page)

5. God's part and our part in overcoming sin (*Genesis 4 – 5*)

God spoke to Cain (4:7), before Cain killed his brother, in words that have a lot of application to us today:

*" . . . sin is crouching at your door;
it desires to have you, but you must master it."*

That tells us what we know is true about Satan – he wants sin to control us. The fact that this conversation took place before Cain sinned, also tells us what we know is true about God – he wants to help us be aware of sin's consequences and take steps to master that sin.

Our part/God's part in overcoming sin. As God told Cain, we must make the effort to master sin. We can do that by recognizing temptation when it comes our way, understanding the harmful consequences that Satan desires to inflict upon us through that sin, and resisting it. On the other hand, we can't possibly do any of that by our own power alone. Only Jesus can actually defeat Satan and destroy his work.

I Corinthians 10:13 is a famous passage describing God's faithfulness to always provide the way of escape from any temptation. The implied responsibility on our part is to look for that escape and take it. God has always had a plan to deal with the sin in our lives. Meditate on all of this and pray to God about your determination to do your part in his plan and for your faith to trust God to always do his part.

Chapter 4 closes with the statement:

At that time, people began to call on the name of the LORD.

Calling on the name of the LORD is a phrase that you will see occasionally in our study of **Genesis**. What do you think that meant? (See also **Romans 10:13**.)

The fifth chapter of **Genesis** gives a list of some of the descendants of Adam through his son Seth. It is always remarkable to see how long they lived. Do you have any ideas about how that was possible at that time?

One Bible question that is often asked comes from this chapter: *who was the oldest man recorded in the Bible, and how long did he live?* (Hopefully we are learning much more about God from our study of **Genesis** than facts such as that one, but recall that half of our goal is to know the Bible better, so facts can be important.)

Verses 21 to 24 refer to Enoch, who is the one in this list with the shortest life-span. But he stands out for a much better reason. He is the one in this chapter of whom it was said: *He walked with God*. In spite of the many sinful

(continued on the next page)

influences during that time, Enoch walked with God. What do you think that meant for him? (See also **Hebrews 11:5 – 6.**)

Meditate and pray about how you can be like Enoch. Walk with God!

Thought Questions

What do these Scriptures and your own experiences tell you about:

1. Satan's plan and goal for temptation and sin?
2. Our challenges and hopes in dealing with temptation and sin?
3. God's heart for helping us deal with temptation and sin?

Notes

Additional Study #3

Peter's Commentary about the Flood

Read 1 Peter 3:18 – 22.

This passage compares the waters of our baptism to the waters of the flood.

When we think about our themes of judgment and salvation that are being emphasized in the devotional readings from **Genesis 6 – 8**, it is easy to see how the flood was a judgment of the world of Noah's day and how Noah and his family were saved by the ark. However, this passage also implies that it was the waters of the flood that actually saved the world of Noah's time just as we are saved today in the waters of our baptism.

One huge difference, of course, between then and now: the waters of the flood saved the world by washing away the sinners (see **Genesis 7:21**), while the waters of our baptism save us by washing away the sins.

Which would you rather have: washing away the sinners or washing away the sins?

Additional Study #4

God's Patience

The passage referred to in the study above from **1 Peter 3:18 – 22** has another interesting comment about God.

Verse 20 points out that God waited patiently during the time the ark was being built. (Recall from our reading about how long that was.) This is not about Noah's faith and perseverance during that time, even though that is also an interesting point. This is about God's patience during that time.

Recall what the spiritual conditions on earth were like and how it grieved God.

There's no reason to think that he enjoyed watching the sinful way in which they treated one another during those years. He had to be very patient, so that everyone who could be saved would be saved.

So don't confuse God's patience today with his approval of what is going on.

Additional Study #1

Science and Creation

It's not hard to find discussions that claim that Science and the Bible contradict each other. One conclusion that many people have come to is that these apparent contradictions are the result of either an unproven scientific theory (such as the origin of the species as the result of millions of years of evolution) or an unnecessary Bible interpretation (such as the attempts to date the earth based on Biblical genealogies).

For instance, the science of evolution (which just means change) is an observable fact. Species change (evolve) through the process of natural selection to adapt to their environment. There is certainly nothing unbiblical about that. But to theorize that life came into existence by that process is not only lacking in scientific evidence, it is clearly against all Scripture that consistently points to God as the creator and mankind as his image bearers.

Note: For further study, you might want to visit the website, organized by John Clayton, www.doesgodexist.org. Mr. Clayton who started out as an atheist came to the conclusion of the existence of God and became the author of numerous materials on Evidences of God.

Additional Study #2

Tough Bible Questions

Genesis 6:1 – 4 brings up three questions that are very difficult to answer.

- What is meant by the “sons of God” who married the “daughters of men” (6:1 – 2)?
- What does it mean that the days of mankind would be 120 years (6:3)?
- Who were the Nephilim (6:4)?

These questions may not interest everyone, and it is possible to get important spiritual applications of this chapter from the easier to understand verses such as the ones referred to on page 8. But if these questions do interest you, you can do some reading and studying about them. One place to look is the website: gotquestions.org. Simply type one of the above questions (or any other question) and read what it says. Of course, you may not always agree with everything in their answer, since that website is not God, but it usually gives you some good options to think about.

In general, though, don't be surprised about Bible questions that are tough to answer. They usually (if not always) fit in the category of facts about the Bible that are not necessary to understand in order to get the big picture, rather than facts about the Bible that are essential to your understanding of God and, therefore, your salvation.

Week 3

Genesis 6 – 11
Genesis 6 – 11

God the Patient Judge

Verse 5 of chapter 6 talks about how great the wickedness of mankind had become.

“Every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.”

Wow! That's pretty severe. What do you think could have led God's image bearers to get to that point?

1. God's heartache and Noah's exceptional walk with God (*Genesis 6*)

Verse 6 shows how God felt about the sin of that time. Can you imagine the heartache that would cause the loving Creator to be sad that he made us? Let that thought encourage your admiration of God's patience.

(See Additional Study #2, p. 31, about some tough questions from chapter 6.)

The first word in verse 8 is “But.” Noah stood out to God in sharp contrast with the rest of the world of that day. Verse 9 says that Noah “walked with God.” Enoch was the other person that we saw with that same description. Imagine what that meant for Noah, living in the conditions that verse 6 shows.

Verse 22 of chapter 6 is so amazing that it is repeated in 7:5. If obedience is extremely easy for you, you might not get much amazement from this statement about Noah; but if you're like the rest of humanity who find it hard to obey even one command some of the time, then this attribute of Noah is indeed exceptional. For instance:

- Think about how long it took to build that ark.
- Think also about how difficult it was to make it and the kind of ridicule Noah probably experienced during that time. How hard would it be to stay obedient all of those years?

In spite of the difficulties that we can well imagine, he had unimaginable obedience. Doesn't that thought inspire you? What are your thoughts?

2. Faith and Obedience

While this chapter emphasizes Noah's obedience, **Hebrews 11:7** refers to his faith. Scripture makes it clear that faith and obedience are always related.

(continued on the next page)

Jesus told us to pray that God's will would be done on earth as it is done in heaven. We can imagine that in heaven, whatever God says is done quickly, completely, with no excuses, and with a great attitude. Noah is a good example of someone who practiced that on earth at a very difficult time.

"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Matthew 6:10



Meditate about that and pray about your obedience.

Lord, I want to obey you just like Noah did and just like it's done in heaven.

3. *Behind the scenes (Genesis 7)*

Meanwhile, let's look at the weather report.

- When did it start raining?
- How long did it rain?

And now let's look at the behind-the-scenes human interest stories. (Or "we don't know for sure, but it's not hard to imagine.")

- What do you imagine happened inside the ark after God shut the door?
- What do you imagine happened outside the ark?

(See Additional Studies #3 and 4 for two more thoughts about the flood.)

Meditate about that and pray with gratitude about the way God has judged and saved you.

4. *The Rainbow Covenant of the Patient God (Genesis 8 – 10)*

We read that God expected the animals that came from the ark (8:17) and the people (9:1) to repopulate the earth.

- What new food habits began after the flood (9:3)?
- What covenant did God make with Noah at that time? (See the Additional Study #6 on page 34 for a brief study about covenants.)

What was Noah's first mentioned sin (9:21)?

There are many genealogies in the Bible such as the one found in Chapter 10. They are tedious readings, and some people find them frankly boring. Why do you think there are so many genealogical chapters in the Bible and what does that tell you about God and his interest in people?

Author's note: one relatively small goal I have is to encourage a different outlook on genealogical lists in the Bible. They put names of actual people (like you and me) into the Bible stories. Tedious reading? Absolutely. But definitely not boring! God knows you and your story by name also. (J.S.)



Genesis:
The Book of Beginnings

Additional Studies

These 12 Additional Studies can be used, as you have time, during this study of Genesis, or they can be used anytime in the future as follow-up studies to some of the topics we came across in our readings.

Contents

Titles	Page
Additional Study #1 "Science and Creation"	31
Additional Study #2 "Tough Bible Questions"	31
Additional Study #3 "Peter's Commentary about the Flood"	32
Additional Study #4 "God's Patience"	32
Additional Study #5 "Names for God"	33
Additional Study #6 "Covenants"	34
Additional Study #7 "Melchizedek"	35
Additional Study #8 "Faith Credited as Righteousness"	35
Additional Study #9 "Abraham's Faith"	36
Additional Study #10 "Tests"	36
Additional Study #11 "God's Choices"	37
Additional Study #12 "The Heart and Strategy for Memorizing Scriptures"	37

Genesis

The Book of Beginnings

Conclusion

Genesis truly is the book of beginnings. The beginning of our universe, the beginning of our human history, the beginning of the revelation of the nature of God, the beginning of our struggle with sin, the beginning of God's plan of salvation, and the beginning of faith as the necessary ingredient of an obedient walk with God.

We've seen how God can use flawed people to fulfill his flawless plan. They did some very messed-up things that no one would be proud of, but God was able to use them to accomplish his purposes. Hopefully all of us can believe that if God can use Jacob, he can use us! Not that anyone should want to use the story of Jacob as an excuse for deliberate sin, but we can all believe that God's perfect plans are not thwarted by our imperfections. Sin needs to be repented of, but it never has to be the last word in our story. God can forgive us and help us move on.

We've also seen the amazing faith of men and women who went against all odds to be faithful. People, like Joseph, who refused to let their circumstances and rotten luck define them as victims without hope. They were people of integrity and great trust.

Let's close with what the Bible says about these heroes of faith:

*All these people were still living by faith when they died . . .
Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God,
for he has prepared a city for them.*

Hebrews 11:13, 16

God, help us be like them.

May you continue to grow in your desires to know the Bible better and to know God better. To him be all the glory.

John Sullivan

5. The tower of Babel (Genesis 11)

The tower of Babel, in Chapter 11, is fascinating, to say the least.

- You can see that their basic sin seemed to be pride. Think about what that teaches us today.
- Their punishment obviously changed the world for the rest of history.

Abraham, who will be the focus of our next few studies, is mentioned at the end of this chapter as a descendant of Noah's son Shem.

Meditate and pray about how you can learn from the mistakes of others and can continue to be faithful to God today and throughout your life.

Thought Questions

1. What stands out to you about God when you think of him as the patient judge?
2. What stands out to you about your desire to have the faith and obedience that Noah had?

Notes

God the Promiser and the Great Promise Keeper

At this time, Abraham was still called Abram. God asked him to leave his home country and go to a land God would show him. Look at the map on page i to see where Abram started (Haran) and where God eventually brought him (Canaan). You can imagine the challenges of such a long trip. Remember, God didn't even tell Abram where they were going. You can also read **Hebrews 11:8 – 10** for a helpful commentary from God's own words about Abram's faith at that time.

To get the historical setting, also look up in a resource such as those listed on page 39 to see what the world was like at that time (about 1921 BC).

1. Blessed by God to be a blessing (Genesis 12)

In God's words to Abram in the first part of Chapter 12, we see one of the attributes of God that we love so much: He is the Promiser and the Great Promise Keeper. He promised to bless Abram, and he promised that Abram would be a blessing to others. Think for a few moments about how that relates to you also: you are blessed to be a blessing.

You see Abram's trusting, obedient response. How does that inspire you in your desire to trust and obey?

Verse 8 of Chapter 12 contains the phrase that we saw about others in Chapter 4: *Abram called on the name of the LORD*. He built there the first of many altars that we will see him build. Think about what it means for you personally to call on the name of the LORD.

2. The need for grace

The Bible never tries to cover up the mistakes of even the people that are otherwise heroes of faith. Abram is no exception. Immediately after the description of Abram's admirable trust and obedience, there is the story in 12:10 – 20 of this flaw in his character. His fear for his own safety temporarily took over his faith and led him to lie about his wife. It is an issue that we will actually see him repeat in a later chapter.

So this certainly shows that Abram was not sinless. As faithful and obedient as he was in so many areas, he still needed God's grace – a thought that will be amplified in Chapter 15. How does that impact you?

Like Abram, we are also trying to live a life of faith and obedience. Yet we make many mistakes. Meditate about what this tells you about God and how much we need him.

Remember: God is always faithful in keeping his promises, but he is not always fast (by our standards of timing).

There's about a 400-year gap between the ending of **Genesis** and the beginning of **Exodus**, as God had long ago predicted to Abraham. God knows what he's doing and he has the power and the wisdom to accomplish his will, even though it may seem to us that it takes a long time. Reflect on that.

5. Summary and review

Meditate about the story of Joseph as a whole and think about how it helps your faith and confidence in God.

Reflect also about your study of *Genesis* and how it has helped you to know God better and know his Word better.

Thought Questions

1. What do you learn from Joseph's story about the presence and providence of God that you want to apply to your life?
2. What do you learn from Joseph's convictions that you also want to apply to your life?
3. How do you feel about the faithfulness of God, in spite of how long it may sometimes take to fulfill his purposes?

Notes

of famine. He was now 30 years old. Joseph's brothers (excluding Benjamin) showed up to buy food. Joseph recognized them, but they didn't recognize him. Can you imagine what temptations Joseph could have been going through as he saw his dreams that he had at age 17 now coming true?

What a story! It's not over yet, but things are starting to make sense to Joseph. What could God be planning for your life 13 years from now?

3. Jacob's family in Egypt (Genesis 45)

Joseph's brothers come back for the second time, and he revealed himself to them. Joseph sent some of Egypt's carts (the first example of U-Haul!) back to pick up Jacob and the family. His advice for them was to not argue during their trip (45:24) – he knew his brothers well!

Jacob's family numbered 70 people (including Joseph and his family) when they came to Egypt (46:27). Before he died, Jacob blessed his sons. They, of course, became what we call the 12 tribes of Israel.

How does the way God blessed Jacob and his dysfunctional family encourage you?

4. God's providence in Joseph's life (Genesis 46 – 50)

When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers (45:4 – 8), he told them that he could see that God had a purpose for all that happened and that God was involved in all of it.

When Jacob died, Joseph's brothers were worried that he now might bring some punishment on them. But Joseph reassured them by telling them that he forgave them and would take care of them. His statement in 50:19 is a good one for us to remember:

"Am I in the place of God?"

Verse 20 of chapter 50 is another great verse to memorize. Some people have said that this is the Old Testament's version of **Romans 8:28**:

*And we know that in all things God works
for the good of those who love him,
who have been called according to his purpose.*

When life seems to want to harm us, God can use it to bring about good.

While all of this is a clear sign of God's providence delivering them from the famine of that day, it is not evident how it all relates to God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their descendants would possess the land of Canaan. They're in Egypt now, not Canaan. Fulfilling that promise actually took another four hundred years. Recall from chapter 15 (verses 13 – 16) why God said that it was necessary to wait that long.

3. Abram and Lot (Genesis 13)

Chapter 13 deals with Abram's nephew Lot. You can see the choice that Abram gave Lot. Lot's motivation seemed to be what he selfishly thought was best for him, but he ignored the dangers of the sinful city of Sodom. In future readings, we will see the consequences of that lack of judgment.

Verse 4 of Chapter 13 once again notes that Abram *called on the name of the LORD*, a principle that seems to be consistent in Abram's life. We know that Abram was a man who trusted God (in spite of some lapses that we saw earlier). We see here that he was also an unselfish, generous man. We also see here how God took care of him. Hopefully that is an inspiration for us.

Do you see how trusting God and being unselfish and generous go together?

When you see the characteristics of Lot and of Abram, you might want to pray to God about which lifestyle you want to emulate.

4. Melchizedek (Genesis 14)

The first part of Chapter 14 talks about Abram rescuing Lot who had been captured during a war between kings of that area. Abram was able to defeat a king who had conquered many kingdoms. He refused, though, the plunder offered to him by the king of Sodom.

In 14:18 – 20, Abram met Melchizedek. Look at the Additional Study #7 on page 35 for more information about him. The details of the story of Melchizedek may or may not interest or inspire you, but hopefully you see the impact of Melchizedek's and Abram's faith and praises to God as God Most High and as the Creator. You might want to use those ideas in your prayers today.

5. God is the reward (Genesis 15)

God told Abram that He was his reward (15:1). Meditate on that concept awhile and what it means to you personally.

God promised Abram numerous offspring. We are told in verse 6 simply that Abram believed him. That verse is a great verse to memorize. It is an important concept that is highlighted and discussed in the New Testament. (See also **Hebrews 11:11 – 12** and the Additional Study #8 on page 35.) We have seen one example of Abram's sin, and we will see others. So he was not sinless. Like all of us, even his faith and obedience did not make up for his sins. But God credited his faith as righteousness.

Chapter 15 closes with a visual demonstration from God showing more details about the land he was promising Abram. God said that he was going to wait 400 years to fulfill that promise. The reason for the wait involved the sin of

(continued on the next page)

the people in that land (15:16). God was going to give them time to repent, like he always does. Of course, we finally see the fulfillment of that promise in the book of **Exodus**, 400 years later.

Meditate about God being your reward and how grateful you are to have your faith credited as righteousness.

Thought Questions

1. In what ways has God blessed you and how does he want you to be a blessing to others (like he told Abram in 12:2 – 3)?
2. Look at **2 Peter 1:3 – 4**. How much do you believe what is said there; i.e. do you believe that God is the Promiser and the Great Promise Keeper?
3. What does it mean to you personally to have God credit your faith as righteousness?

Notes

Week 9

Genesis 39 – 50
Genesis 39 – 50

God's Presence and Providence

The readings for this section are a little longer than the previous sections. But the story flows, and it's kind of hard to put it down. It makes you think that there could be a great musical based on this story. Wait! Somebody has already done that.

1. God's presence with Joseph (Genesis 39 – 40)

Verses 2, 21 and 23 of chapter 39 point out the key element in this time of Joseph's life: *God was with him*. Joseph probably didn't recognize that in every moment, especially when he was falsely accused and arrested. But he soon began to realize the reality of God's presence and providence, an important realization for us as well.

God was with Joseph! That is the key statement about what God was doing. On the other hand, Joseph's commitment to God was the key statement about what Joseph was doing. Despite the fact that Joseph had so much going wrong in his life, and that he had no faithful person that we know of around him to encourage him, Joseph was determined to not sin. You see that in verse 9 of Chapter 39: his key motivation for not sinning was his relationship with God.

His convictions came with a cost – being falsely accused and arrested. But there were also rewards for his convictions. (For instance, see verses 21 – 23 of Chapter 39.)

In Chapter 40, Joseph correctly interprets the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker. The last verse, however, tells the sad story of the cupbearer's forgetfulness. Joseph was forgotten! We know the good news of how it eventually turned out, but try to imagine what it was like for Joseph at that time. He hadn't read the end of the story yet.

Reflect on the impact of God's presence in Joseph's life and how that applies to your life.

2. The dreamer interprets dreams – with God's help (Genesis 41 – 44)

Two full years passed and Joseph was still in prison. Imagine what that was like. Pharaoh had a dream, and the cupbearer finally remembered Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. Do you see how what Joseph told Pharaoh (41:16) showed his humility and confidence in God?

Pharaoh rewarded Joseph for interpreting his dreams and put him in charge of collecting food during the years of plenty and distributing food during the years
(continued on the next page)

not us. And he didn't leave it out, even though it again shows the dark side of our heroes in the faith.

The children and Tamar are all mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus, **Matthew 1:3**. As we have frequently seen, God doesn't hide anything about our ancestors.

Spend some time thanking God for his honesty and for the way he uses our lives in spite of our mistakes or what others may have done to us.

Thought Questions

1. There are several sad and tragic events described in these chapters, many of them at the hands of those who were laying the foundation for God's people. Meditate and share your thoughts about what that tells you about the theme that we have seen several times:

God is able to use flawed people, like us, in his flawless plan.

2. What do these stories also tell you about where God is when these tragedies happen today?

Notes

Week 5

Genesis 16 – 20
Genesis 16 – 20

God Almighty

Abram and Sarai had been faithfully following God and waiting for the fulfillment of his promises. By the time of this reading they had been waiting for 11 years for a son. (Do the math from **Genesis 12:4** and **16:16**.)

1. Waiting for God (*Genesis 16*)

Have you ever had to wait that long for something you believed God was going to do? Unfortunately in their case, they did something that they regretted later. They probably would tell us today that there is no excuse for what they did, but can you understand what they were feeling?

Sarai and Abram decided to help God out in fulfilling his promise by having a son through the maidservant Hagar. But then, you see Sarai's reaction when it actually happened the way she planned. She wanted to get rid of Hagar. Lest Sarai gets all the blame for this, you also see that Abram did nothing to stop any of this from happening.

This is certainly not a shining moment in their usually exemplary lives. As we have noted before, our heroes in the faith sometimes exhibited huge character flaws. *Does this make it even more clear why they and all of us need God's grace?*

2. The God who sees me (*Genesis 17*)

Hagar's name for God was fitting for what was happening to her (16:13): *The God who sees me*. (See the Additional Study #5 on page 33: *Names for God*.) How does that characteristic of God inspire you?

NOTE: The well *Beer Lahai Roi* ("the well of the Living One who sees me") in verse 14 will be a location that you will see in future stories.

The name *El Shaddai* (*God Almighty*) first appears (17:1). He is almighty; not weak in any way; nothing is impossible with Him!

Abram's name was changed to Abraham (17:5) – from "father" to "father of many." Sarai's name was changed to Sarah (17:15) – from "my princess" to "princess," possibly also indicating her broader role in humanity's history.

The covenant sign of circumcision is first seen in 17:9 – 14. Abraham was 99 years old at that time, and Ishmael was 13. God said that Ishmael would produce a great nation, but He still promised Abraham and Sarah a son. Note that this repetition of that promise is over 20 years after it was first given.

Pray to *the God who sees you* and tell him how grateful you are.

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3. Abraham – the friend of God (Genesis 18)

Chapter 18 shows God's plan for the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and Abraham's pleading with God over them. **James 2:23** refers to the passage we read earlier about God crediting Abraham's faith as righteousness. That passage also calls Abraham *God's friend*. (See also **2 Chronicles 20:7** and **Isaiah 41:8**.) You can see that friendship exhibiting itself in this prayer, which shows us the kind of relationship and communication we can have with God – being totally open about what's on our heart while staying completely surrendered to His will.

Meditate about how much you want to be a friend to God.

4. Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19)

Chapter 19 is certainly not fun reading, is it? This is a story that we happen to see referred to frequently in other Scriptures. Can you imagine how many more times God has to witness situations like this? Probably many more times than are recorded in the Bible. Remember the statements in Chapter 6 about the evil conditions before the flood. God promised that he would never again destroy the whole world with a flood, but it's easy to see how often we have tried his patience. We are told that the "*outcry to the LORD*" about what Sodom and Gomorrah was doing was so great at that time that God had to send his angels to punish them (19:13).

You're probably not very impressed, to say the least, with Lot's offer in 19:8, are you? Fortunately, the evil men of the city did not take him up on that. It certainly doesn't seem like Lot had been a good influence on that city. We are told in verse 29 that God rescued Lot from this catastrophe because of his consideration for Abraham.

The story of Lot's wife looking back and turning into a pillar of salt is a famous one. We are not given much detail about that event. So, we don't know if she had some evil desire in her heart to go back there, or if this was just a matter of disobeying God. See Jesus' brief reference to her in **Luke 17:32**.

And if all of that wasn't enough to make it clear what happens when we leave God out of our lives and the lives of our families, the closing story in Chapter 19 about Lot's daughters is enough to break your heart. While this is not the most enjoyable type of stories to read about, we can still meditate about what God wants us to learn from them. Pray for the lost and ask God to help you share the good news with them.

5. Abraham lies again (Genesis 20)

Chapter 20 could be called "Abraham Lies Again." Really? Didn't Abraham learn his lesson the first time? Evidently not. Fortunately, we don't see Abraham doing this again, although verse 13 seems to imply that this was a plan that they had considered using whenever they came to new places.

Verse 11 of Chapter 35 shows *El Shaddai* appearing to Jacob again. God repeated some of the promises that he had given Jacob's father and grandfather, along with the reminder of his name being changed to Israel.

Rachel died as she was giving birth to the twelfth son, Benjamin. She was buried in Bethlehem. After that, Jacob came home to his father Isaac, who then passed away. Jacob and Esau came together to bury him.

Chapter 36 is another of those genealogy chapters that are so hard to read. This one gives the account of Esau. His descendants became the Edomites, a nation that the Israelites encountered many times in the remaining history of the Old Testament.

Spend some time praying to *El Shaddai*, praising him for being God Almighty.

4. Joseph sold into slavery (Genesis 37)

We are told in Chapter 37 that Jacob favored Joseph more than his other sons. We saw the damage that this kind of favoritism did to Jacob and Esau. Now we see the problems it caused in Jacob's family.

Joseph, at the age of 17, had these dreams about the future. The brothers reacted with anger and jealousy. Their anger and jealousy led Joseph's brothers to an unthinkable level. Reuben tried to protect him. But when Reuben wasn't around, they sold Joseph to a band of Midianite merchants, also called Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt. (The precise meanings of the terms "*Midianite*" and "*Ishmaelite*" are not clear in the case of these merchants.)

The brothers told their father Jacob a lie. Little did they know that years later their deception would be brought to light.

The last thing we hear about Joseph in this chapter is that he was taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials. Of course, we will hear much more about him in next few chapters.

These kind of stories always make us wonder where God is and why he puts up with things like this. The answer to that is usually not clear at all during the difficult time. As we will see in the last chapter of **Genesis**, God will make it clear later on. Meanwhile, pray about your own faith and trust, especially during those times that you can't see what God is planning for your life.

5. More dark family drama (Genesis 38)

Another dark chapter in the life of Jacob's family is revealed in Chapter 38. This time the revelation is about Judah and his sin. As you read this chapter in the context of this part of **Genesis**, you get the impression that this story did not have to be told. We could go straight from the last verse of chapter 37 about Joseph being sold into slavery to chapter 39 about his life in Egypt, and skip this story all together. Obviously, though, God is writing this story,

God's Use of Flawed People (2)

Recall from Chapter 32 that Jacob heard the news that Esau was coming to meet him. We read there about how Jacob reacted when he heard the news. On a positive note, he approached God in prayer with humility and gratitude. On a less positive note, he also schemed to provide bribes to Esau.

1. *Jacob's meeting with Esau (Genesis 33)*

As it turned out their meeting as described in Chapter 33 went well. Esau set the example and was actually glad to see him. The last verse of that chapter mentions the altar that Jacob built, naming it *El Elohe Israel*, which means *God, the God of Israel or Mighty is the God of Israel*. This is the first example we have of that name, and it gives us hope about Jacob's character and relationship with God.

What do you learn from Esau's example here?

2. *Family drama (Genesis 34)*

Chapter 34, on the other hand, is exceptionally sad. You hate to hear about events like this in today's news. Unfortunately, it was happening back then also. We read here about Jacob's sons and what they did to revenge the sin against Dinah. After his sons had taken this action, Jacob was afraid that the Canaanites would come after him. (The next chapter, however, shows how God took care of them.)

While this is a tragic reading, you can see that God knows all about the tragedies in life as well as he does the highpoints. You may have experienced similar situations or know families who have. Pray for God to open up our eyes to see his love in times like these.

3. *God's promises repeated to Jacob (Genesis 35 – 36)*

Verses 1 – 15 of Chapter 35 talk about Jacob returning to Bethel where he had experienced the dream earlier. We see here that Jacob told his family to get rid of any idols that were in their possession. Were you surprised to hear that they still had those idols?

In the previous chapter, Jacob had expressed his fear that the people around him might punish them for what they did to revenge the sin against Dinah. According to 35:5, though, the "terror of God" went with Jacob and protected them.

It's not hard to imagine some lessons God taught Abraham through this encounter with Abimelech, or at least some lessons it teaches us – such as: not to let fear be an excuse for lying, and, for husbands, to protect your wife a lot more than what we see here.

It's also not hard to imagine some lessons Abimelech learned, such as: God is powerful and yet he is also understanding about our circumstances.

Take some time to think back on what we have read so far in **Genesis**. Meditate and pray about how grateful you are that God loves us and forgives us in spite of our many flaws (which are actually probably more than Abraham and Sarah's, right?).

Thought Questions

1. Meditate about being patient and faithful, and pray to the *God who sees You*. What can you do to make sure you do not try to help him out when his timing seems to be slow?
2. (Agree or Disagree?) People of today are so much more sinful than people of the past.
3. Do you plead with God about the lost the way Abraham did?

Notes

God the Tester and Provider

Recall that Abraham was 75 when God first promised him that he would become a great nation. He was 100 when Isaac was born. That's quite a little wait, wouldn't you say? (Look at Additional Study #9 on page 36 for what the New Testament says about Abraham's faith and how that can apply to us.)

1. The Eternal God (Genesis 21)

In spite of Abraham and Sarah's usual faithfulness and God's constant faithfulness, we have seen before that our heroes in the faith did not always do things that we admire. And, as we have also noted before, God doesn't fail to record those instances.

- Chapter 21 shows their treatment of Hagar and Ishmael after Isaac was born.
- But verse 20 points out that God was with Ishmael during that time.

Verse 33 of that chapter refers to the phrase that we have also seen before: *Abraham called upon the name of the LORD*. Here God is referred to for the first time in Scripture as *El Olam – The Eternal God*. As we think about how much we want to imitate the faith of Abraham and Sarah, we realize even more how much we appreciate the faithfulness of God. He is not just "eternal" in terms of longevity; he is eternally faithful, consistently present and reliable.

Pray a prayer of praise for all of the eternal qualities of God.

2. The Tests of All Tests (Genesis 22)

"God tested Abraham" (22:1). That's quite an understatement, isn't it? (See also **Hebrews 11:17 – 19** for great insight into this story.)

Genesis 22:14 is another great verse to memorize and take to heart. The King James Version says that Abraham called that place "*Jehovah Jirah*". The modern translation of that phrase is: "*The LORD will provide*." (Note that centuries later the location of this sacrifice would be known as Jerusalem where the temple was built.)

You can imagine what Abraham learned from this experience about God as the Tester and Provider (as the title of this page points out). You can also imagine how this test could have impacted Isaac. What God concluded as a result of this test is something that we don't have to imagine, because we are told in verse 12. He could clearly see how much Abraham trusted God. (Look at the Additional Study #10 on page 36 about **Tests** and think about what we can learn from tests that may be occurring in our lives.)

5. Jacob and Esau (Genesis 31 – 32)

Chapter 31 tells the story of Jacob's realization that he needed to take his family and leave his father-in-law's place (after 20 years of being there). Once again, that encounter showed both of them as deceiving and self-serving.

In Chapter 32, Jacob received the news that he was going to have a reunion with his brother Esau. Jacob reacted to that news with fear (verse 7). To his credit, though, he prayed to God about it (verses 9 – 13). His prayer shows the admirable qualities of humility and gratitude. Jacob's name was changed to *Israel*, which means *struggles with God*, or perhaps more accurately, *the one with whom God struggles*. This was to be the name that would describe God's chosen people throughout the Old Testament.

Pray about what you can learn from the flawed life of Jacob.

Thought Questions

1. How often do you think fear of what other people will think about us is related to our temptation to lie?
2. What do you want to imitate about the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and what do you also want to learn from their mistakes?
3. Applying Jacob's discovery found in 28:16: what can we do to make sure we don't go through our day unaware of the presence of God?

Notes

sons – Rebekah favored Jacob and Isaac favored Esau. We see here that Rebekah was the one who told Isaac what to do in this deceit.

Meditate about what you learn from both the good and the bad examples found in these stories.

3. Flawed People in God's Flawless Plan (Genesis 28)

Even though Jacob's deceit was something that he would regret later, we can see that God still used his life in an important way. Or, saying that from another angle, even though God used Jacob's life in an important way, Jacob made some choices that he would later regret. (See also Additional Study #11 on page 37 about God's choices.)

We see in Chapter 28 how Esau's bitterness led him to do some things that worsened his situation. While we might agree that Esau was mistreated badly, we also learn from his mistakes an important lesson about not making choices that make our situation even worse.

We also see Jacob's dream in this chapter – the dream about the stairway to heaven. Jacob called that place *Bethel – the house of God*. It is located about 15 miles north of what became the city of Jerusalem.

Verse 16 of chapter 28 is another good verse to memorize. When he woke up from the dream, Jacob realized that he had missed the presence of God.

Pray about how you can make sure you avoid that mistake in your life.

4. Rachel and Leah (Genesis 29 – 30)

The stories of Jacob, Rachel and Leah in Chapters 29 – 30 certainly describe a strange and potentially dysfunctional family. There might be some possibility that Jacob was getting deceived by his father-in-law the way he had deceived Esau. The Bible says that God does not treat us the way our sins deserve (**Psalm 103:10**). We probably deserve a lot more payback for our sins than we receive, but that doesn't mean that the consequences of our sins are always easy to take. Imagine, though, what would happen if we got paid back for every deceptive thing we've ever done.

Rachel and Leah's use of their maidservants to get children from Jacob definitely seems strange to us today, but we see how important these children were to God's future plans as they became the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. Once again, God does not hold back revealing the weaknesses of the heroes of the faith, showing how God uses flawed people in his flawless plan.

Applying that to ourselves also, we realize that we can't use this as an excuse to sin, but it is important that we do not limit God by thinking that he can't use us anymore because of our sin.

Tell God how you feel about that.

3. Sarah's death (Genesis 23)

Sarah's death at age 127 is recorded in Chapter 23. The rest of this short chapter gives details about how Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah as a burial place for Sarah near the city of Hebron. Later on, Abraham was buried in this same place. You might find it interesting to read about what is called "*The Tomb of the Patriarchs*," a large structure that exists today in the city of Hebron. This structure, which is said to be built on the sight of this cave, dates back to the time of Herod the Great.

There is no doubt that losing a loved one is a difficult test, and it is encouraging to note that God knows all about these tests in our lives. Yes, the challenge of the faith of Abraham and Sarah while they waited all of those years for Isaac's birth and the test of sacrificing Isaac may be the more intriguing parts of their stories, but this time of their lives was important to God too. God sees it all and is involved in it all! Meditate about that and pray to God, thanking him for his involvement in your daily life.

4. Finding a wife for Isaac – a lesson on prayer (Genesis 24)

Chapter 24 talks about finding a wife for Isaac. Abraham wanted to find someone from his own people, not seeming to trust the people of Canaan. Abraham's servant's prayer is a great example. He asked God to help him make a good choice, and he asked him for a specific sign of God's choice. It is not hard to imagine that he learned how to pray like that from Abraham.

It's also not hard to imagine how Isaac would have been impacted when he heard about this prayer and its results. Hopefully he was always grateful about the knowledge that God provided for him and his wife. Meditate about how you also always want to have that same kind of gratitude.

5. Abraham's descendants (Genesis 25)

After Sarah's death, we are told in Chapter 25 that Abraham married Keturah who bore him six more sons. If you have the time, you might want to research the descendants of Abraham and Keturah, especially the Midianites. Over 400 years later, Moses married a woman from Midian.

Abraham was 175 years old when he died. Isaac and Ishmael buried him at the same place where Sarah was buried.

NOTE: We are told that Isaac spent time in the area of *Beer Lahai Roi* (25:11 and 24:62), the well that we first saw in the story of Hagar in Chapter 16.

A brief account of Ishmael and his descendants is given in 25:13 – 18. You can see there the kind of hostility they had in their relationships with other people.

The birth of Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons, Esau (which means *hairy*) and Jacob (which means *heel grabber*), is recorded next. Right away, they were told that

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the older would serve the younger (more about that in our next readings). The famous story of Esau selling his birthright to Jacob shows flaws in both young men: Esau should have cherished his birthright more carefully (verse 34: "*He despised it.*"), and Jacob shouldn't have given him such a low price. But, as we will continue to see in the rest of **Genesis**, God can use flawed people (like them and like us) in his great plans.

Not everyone we have read about so far in **Genesis** seems to be consistently aware of being made in God's image. Continue to meditate on that thought and how you want to live faithfully in the purpose God intended for you.

Thought Questions

1. How do you really feel about tests?
2. What have you learned from your tests about God being the provider?
3. What do you learn from Abraham's servant's prayer to apply to your prayer life?

Notes

Week 7 Genesis 26 – 32 Genesis 26 – 32

God's Use of Flawed People (I)

God spoke to Isaac in 26:1 – 6. God had promised many blessings to Isaac's father Abraham. Here, he repeated the promises to Isaac about his descendants and the land.

1. Isaac's good and bad traits from his father (Genesis 26)

Verse 5 shows Abraham's awareness of God's laws, over 400 years before the Law of Moses, when God's laws were put in written form. God might have revealed his laws directly to patriarchs like Abraham, and the people of that time would have relied on oral traditions to pass on that information.

So Isaac would have learned a lot about God from his father. For instance, in 26:25, we see the phrase that we saw before describing Abraham: "*Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD.*" Unfortunately, we also see in 26:7 – 16 that he had picked up one of his father's bad characteristics as he lied about his wife. According to Isaac's words in verse 7, fear was a motivating factor for his deception, just as he saw in Abraham's examples.

Wells and altars. In the earlier chapters of **Genesis**, we have seen that there were several mentions of well-digging and altar-making. The names of some of these places when they were first made became important and frequently occurring names in later stories of the Bible. The name of many of the wells start with "*Beer*" which simply means *well*. (For instance *Beer Lahai Roi* was first mentioned in the story of Hagar in Chapter 16.) The one that Isaac dug in this chapter was called *Beersheba – the well of oath*.

Clearly not everyone respected God's laws and called on His name all the time, not even Abraham and Isaac. Pray for your consistency in those areas.

2. Jacob's Deceit; Esau's Bitterness (Chapter 27)

Jacob becomes a key figure in God's plan. The rest of the Old Testament deals with the nation of Israel, which we will see later is the new name God gave to Jacob. When we read about the birth of Jacob in chapter 25, we saw that his name meant "*heal grabber*" – not a particularly flattering name. We also read in that chapter how Jacob, who was the second born of the twins, took Esau's birthright. Now we are reading in this chapter how he deceived Esau of the blessing of his father. His character seems to involve a lot of deceit and hunger for power.

While the Bible does not give a lot of other details about Isaac and Rebekah's parenting skills, it does show their regrettable trait of favoring one of their
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