

IN THE BEGINNING
A STUDY IN
GENESIS

VOLUME 2

MARK DRISCOLL

**IN THE
BEGINNING**

A Study in Genesis

Volume 2: Genesis 15-26

REALFAITH.COM

By Mark Driscoll

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REAL GROUPS WITH REALFAITH

Faith that does not result in good deeds is not real faith.

James 2:20, TLB

At RealFaith, we believe that the Word of God isn't just for us to read, it's to be obeyed. And living in community with fellow believers is one of the ways God the Father allows us to learn and grow to become more like His Son Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. We do this through something called Real Groups. Here are a few tips to start your own.

1. Invite

Invite your friends, neighbors, family, coworkers, and enemies, because they all need Jesus whether they know Him or not! Whether it's a group of men, women, families, students, or singles, explain that you'd like to start a weekly sermon-based small group based on Pastor Mark Driscoll's sermons.

2. Listen to the sermon on realfaith.com or on the RealFaith app

You can host a viewing party to watch **RealFaith Live** and discuss it all at once, or you can watch it separately and gather to discuss it at another time that works for the group.

3. Get into God's Word

In addition to watching the sermon, make sure you and all group members have a study guide from realfaith.com for the current sermon series. There are questions for personal reflection as well

as for groups that can guide your devotional times throughout the week. You can also sign up for Daily Devos at **realfaith.com**.

4. Gather together

Whether at someone's house, a public place, or through something like Zoom, meet weekly to discuss the sermon and what God has taught you through it. The great thing about Real Groups is that you don't all have to be in the same location. You can talk about sermon takeaways, what stood out to you in the study guide, or what God taught you in His Word that week. Focus on personal application as much as possible.

5. Pray

When you gather, feel free to share prayer requests, pray for each other on the spot, and continue praying throughout the week. Prayer is a great unifying force that God gives us to strengthen His family.

6. Share

Send us photos, videos, testimonies, and updates of how your group is doing to **hello@realfaith.com**. You might even be featured on our RealFaith Live show!

There are plenty more resources to discover at **realfaith.com/real-groups**, as well. We will be praying for you and your group and look forward to hearing what God does through it.

PREFACE

The first time I preached through the book of Genesis, I was 34 years old, we had only four of our five children, and they ranged in age at the time from one to seven years of age. My wife Grace and I had been married for 13 years at the time. As I write this study, I am now 51 years old, we have five children, and they are old enough to have a driver's license. Two of our children are in high school, one is in college, and two are married. Grace and I will also thankfully celebrate 30 years of faithful marriage this year.

Since I first preached Genesis, I've walked our oldest daughter down the aisle and officiated her wedding to our son-in-law. I've officiated the wedding of our oldest son to his junior high sweetheart. I've seen our middle son grow up from a little boy to a young man and pray daily for the future wife and family God has for him. I've seen our youngest daughter grow up from a little girl to a young woman and, if I'm honest, I pray for her future husband and family but am nowhere near emotionally ready for that season. Our youngest son no longer needs me to carry him around as he's taller than me with a voice as deep as his dad's and brothers', but if I need someone to carry me, he'd be up for the challenge.

After three decades of marriage with my dream girl, raising five kids, becoming a father-in-law, and now having our extended family comprised of three families that are constantly working on unity and harmony, life has been a master class in family architecting and generational blessing. While the book of Genesis has not changed, my understanding of it has. The older I get, the more I see it as largely a case study in family dynamics and how the decisions of one generation affect the next generation both positively and negatively. As Grace and I hold hands and peer into

a future with an empty nest visited by grandkids in the not-too-distant future, Genesis has become a sobering book. It has caused us to deeply examine marriage, sex, family systems, parenting adult children, and launching the next generation to start their own families. Genesis is helpful in seeing where we can repent of failures in our past and receive wisdom for the future of our extended family.

Genesis opens by telling us of the beauty of creation, marriage, and life together with God. Genesis then soon reports the brutality of sin and how it has cursed creation, marred marriage, and led to life without God. The pain of our sin, the Fall, and curse are perhaps no more deeply felt than in our marriage, parenting, and family. Throughout Genesis, this reality is most honestly recorded. Some 3,500 years later, this timeless book seems timelier than ever in our wounded and weary world where family is fractured, and generations are paying the price for failures that preceded.

Thankfully, Genesis also reveals great hope of new starts for broken families, healing where there is brokenness, restoration where there is ruin, and blessing where there is cursing. While we tend to think in terms of minutes, hours, days, and years, Genesis reminds us to think in terms of generations because one of the most important parts of the life we live is the legacy we leave. Before we begin our generational family study in Genesis 15-26, there are 10 clues to help you get the most out of your reading and study of Genesis to learn next.

CHAPTER I

10 Clues for Getting the Most out of Genesis

Our family has always enjoyed traveling. At a very young age, our kids started traveling the nation and world. Whenever possible, I would arrange my speaking engagements so that Grace and our children could join me in exploring the incredible world we live in, seeing historic sites and meeting exotic people.

To help the kids prepare for our epic adventures, we would do a lot of research in advance and help them understand where we were going, what to look for, and how to get the most out of our travels. What is true of a trip through the world God made is also true of a trip through the Word God wrote.

My sincere hope is that you would repeatedly read Genesis, and use this study guide, along with the accompanying free sermons and daily devotions at realfaith.com, to learn all you can from this incredible book of the Bible. Knowing some of the highlights to look for and how to journey through the book will help you get the most out of your time in one of the most significant books written in the history of the world. In this chapter, you will learn 10 clues for getting the most out of Genesis and what to look for as you travel through its' storyline that covers an incredible roughly 2,000 years of human history, which is about the same timeframe covered in the entire rest of the Bible outside of Genesis.

#1 Genesis is chronological history

On a few dozen occasions, the Bible uses the language of sowing and reaping to teach us the principle of cause and effect.

Oftentimes, we reap pains, problems, and perils in life without having the wisdom to see it's root cause. Failure to learn that what we reap is the result of what we sow causes sin and folly to be repeated, not only in our lives personally, but also in our legacy generationally.

It is very important to note that Genesis unfolds as a narrative written in chronological order, with only a few minor possible exceptions. If this simple fact is overlooked, then the cause-and-effect correlations woven throughout the book will be ignored and much of the meaning of the book lost altogether. The best way to read Genesis is in the chronological order that God worked, and the book is written.

The chronological history of Genesis reminds us that the decisions we sow today lead to the consequences we and others reap tomorrow. Sometimes we see this more clearly in the lives of other people than we do in our own lives. For this reason, Genesis is a case study in family dynamics that helps us to have fresh insights and open eyes to examine the family we grew up in and how it has affected us, as well as the kind of decisions we are making today that will impact our future and the future of our family and friends. The only way to walk in wisdom is to deal with reality, and this is precisely what Genesis does.

#2 Begin with the end in mind

Genesis opens with the words, "In the beginning, God..." which leans into the future anticipating the last days and end of history as we know it. Nearing the end of Genesis, in 49:10, we read about the coming of King Jesus who, in the end, will rule over all nations of the earth and establish His eternal Kingdom. Therefore, Genesis, which is the book of Creation's beginning, points forward to the book of Revelation, which is the book of the last days and beginning of the new Creation ruled over by King Jesus.

As a consequence of Adam's sin, creation was cursed by God.^a Today, Paul says that creation is yearning for its redemption by Jesus^b, who is its Creator.^c This redemption of all creation is made possible by Jesus' death on the cross.^d The lifting of the curse and redeeming of creation will happen at the end of history when Jesus returns to usher in the new Heaven and new earth^e, that will include the tree of life from the Garden of Eden.^f Just as Jesus' life came to an end, and then began anew with a resurrection, so too will all of God's people and creation come to an end and then begin anew with the resurrection of the saints and revealing of the New Creation.

The Bible is a story told in beginning-middle-beginning format. The opening book of the Bible, Genesis, begins with two chapters of Creation, followed by a chapter of judgment for sin. Likewise, the closing book of the Bible, Revelation, closes with two chapters of new creation preceded by judgment for sin. Genesis reveals how God made the world, and Revelation reveals how God will return to His original design plan and remake the world as it was before sin. As you read Genesis and see the beginning, keep in mind the end and the new beginning God has planned for his people and creation. God's original divine design in Genesis 1-2 was perfect. We made a mess of everything with our sin, but God will not deviate from His original plan because He got it right the first time. What we refer to as Heaven will actually be a renewed Heaven and Earth coming together where we will live forever in physical bodies creating culture, exploring the cosmos, enjoying one another, and worshipping God together.

#3 Use your imagination

Genesis is comprised of narrative, genealogy, and poetry. Also

^a Genesis 3:17-19 ^b Romans 8:19-25 ^c I Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16 ^d Colossians 1:20; II Corinthians 5:17-21; Ephesians 1:7-10 ^e Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:1 ^f Revelation 22:2; cf. Genesis 2:9, 3:22, 3:24

sprinkled throughout the book are poetic images that require imagination to fully appreciate and understand. Examples include God “seeing” the goodness of His creation (1:2, 1:10, 1:18, 1:21, 1:25, 1:31), God making man with His hands (2:7), a fallen angel appearing as a talking serpent (3:1), God “walking” with Adam in the garden (3:8), Abel’s blood crying out from the ground (4:10), Noah “walking” with God (6:9), God “smelling” Noah’s sacrifice (8:21), God as a shield (15:1), Ishmael described as a “wild donkey” of a man (16:12), and Jesus portrayed as a king by a “scepter” and “staff” (49:10). These kinds of images will not be as memorable or meaningful as they should or could be unless we use some Spirit-filled imagination to grasp the wonderful perspectives of these word pictures.

It is important to note that simply because Moses occasionally writes in poetic imagery does not mean that he is being allegorical or mythical. Much like our own communication, Bible authors like Moses communicate literal truths in figurative ways. For example, the guy who says he’s so hungry he could eat a horse is not really wanting to have a saddle and hooves for dinner, but we get the point. Sometimes an image or metaphor communicates a truth in the most clear, powerful, and memorable way, and this is often the case in Genesis.

#4 Pay attention to specific people and places

Genesis is not a record of all of world history. Rather, it is a selective and theologically arranged history of primarily one family of people and one piece of land. This explains why it says nothing about what was happening in Taiwan thousands of years ago, or what left-handed people in Argentina were struggling with in the ancient world. The Bible does not tell us about everyone everywhere. As you read Genesis, it is important to see the book through a narrow lens focused close-up on a specific people, primarily the family line of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, in a specific place, primarily Israel. Also referred to as

the “seed”, the point of this family line is to bring forth Jesus Christ, which is the telos or end goal of God throughout Genesis and the rest of the Scriptures. Here are a few examples of specific people and places to look for in Genesis:

Seed

The word “seed” appears nearly 60 times in English translations of Genesis and only about 170 times in the other 38 Old Testament books combined. The word can be interpreted several ways, most often dictated by the context in which it appears. Examples include descendants, offspring, seed, children, family, grain, semen, line, and people. It can also be used in a singular sense (e.g. Genesis 21:13), or plural sense (e.g. Genesis 28:14) much like our English word sheep. In Genesis there is generally a correlation between a seed and that which produced it which explains why plants and trees make their own kind (e.g. Genesis 1:11-12), and children throughout the book often resemble their parents in attitude and action.

Ultimately, all the promises and blessings of Genesis given to Abraham and his many seed (those who, like him, worship God by faith) are fulfilled in Jesus, who is the singular seed of Abraham. It is Jesus who is the promised seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15. In Matthew 1:1,17, Jesus is described as the seed of Abraham through the family line of His mother Mary. In John 8:48-59, Jesus claims to be the God of Abraham and therefore greater than Abraham. Lastly, Paul emphatically states that Jesus Christ is the promised seed of Abraham through whom all nations of the earth will be blessed. Galatians 3:16 says, “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ.”

Land

The original recipients of Genesis were trying to get back to the land God had promised them. After 400 years in Egypt, God’s

people were wandering around the wilderness on their journey back to the place where Adam was created by God and the place to which Abraham was called by God.

In an interesting play on words, the first man is Adam, and the ground he is made from is called *adama*, as there is a close relationship between the ground and the man who was made from the dust of the ground. Additionally, the man was made to work the land, but the ground was cursed on account of the man's sin, and the man was expelled from the land of the Garden of Eden. Adam's son, Cain, works the land^a, and the land cries out to avenge Abel's blood after his murder.^b Noah is then born as a comfort from the toil of the land^c and a man of the soil^d who builds an ark to save himself and his family from the flooding of the land.

Because people require a place, much like a family that lives in a home, land is spoken of by various words on some 400 occasions throughout Genesis. When Genesis speaks of the land (or earth, depending upon which English translation you read), it refers to the entire planet on some occasions, but more frequently refers to the Promised Land, or nation of Israel.

In Genesis, the Promised Land which God promised to the offspring/seed of Abraham is the only nation in history which God clearly defined the boundaries of.^e Surrounding the question of who has the right to possess this piece of land has been an intense theological, political, and military conflict that rages in the Middle East to this day. On one side of the conflict are racial and cultural Jews who range from spiritually Jewish to Jewish Christians and even atheists who claim that the land is theirs because they are the "seed of Abraham" through Abraham's wife Sarah. And since the land was promised to Abraham and his "seed" (or offspring as some Bible translations say), they believe that it rightfully belongs to them as they can trace their physical genealogy back to Abraham. On the other side of the conflict are racial and cultural

^a Genesis 4:2 ^b Genesis 4:10-12 ^c Genesis 5:28-29 ^d Genesis 9:20 ^e 12:7, 13:15, 13:17, 15:7, 15:18, 17:8, 24:7, 26:3, 28:13, 28:15, 35:12, 48:4, 50:24

Arabs who are generally Muslim. They likewise say that they, too, are Abraham's "seed" through his Egyptian maidservant Hagar, as they too can trace their physical genealogy back to Abraham the adulterer. Caught in the middle are a minority of racially Jewish and racially Arab Christians on both sides. To say this is a global mess would be a gigantic understatement.

At issue is Genesis 12:7 which says, "The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring [seed] I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him." The question from this text is simply, who is the seed/offspring that the Promised Land was pledged to by God? Is it the Jews? Is it the Arabs? Is it the Christians who are descendants of Abraham by new birth spiritually and not merely by birth physically?

Ultimately, the Promised Land, along with the rest of creation, belongs to Jesus Christ for a variety of reasons. First, the offspring/seed was first mentioned in Genesis 3:15 as Jesus who would defeat Satan. Second, the seed in Genesis 12:7 promised through Abraham is singular and not plural, meaning that it refers to the individual person Jesus, just as it did in Genesis 3:15 and not the collective plural "seeds" which would refer to the nation of Israel as it does in Genesis 13:13-17 and 15:13-18.

The Promised Land belongs to Jesus alone because He is the seed/offspring of Abraham to whom it was promised. Galatians 3:15-16 (NIV) says, "Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ."

In summary, the Promised Land belongs to Jesus, and, in the end, He will share it with His covenant people who trust Him by faith and love Him by grace.^a Anyone who is not in covenant relationship with Jesus as the covenant head will not, in the end,

^a Psalm 37:9; Matthew 5:5

dwell in the eternal Promised Land, even if Abraham is their physical father, because God is not their spiritual Father.

#5 People are case studies to learn from

In the Bible, some texts are prescriptive, meaning they tell us what we should do. Examples would include the biblical command that Christians love one another, children obey their parents, and believers not steal. The Bible also includes descriptive texts that tell us what someone did and leaves it up to the reader to determine if they should do the same. Examples in Genesis would include Lot's daughters getting him drunk to sleep with him, Dinah's brothers slaughtering a town of men for violating their sister, and Judas hanging himself in the Gospels.

As you read Genesis, it is important to determine what Moses, the author of Genesis (and the Holy Spirit as the Author behind the human author), is trying to teach you through the narratives. Just because Cain killed Abel, Noah and Lot get drunk, and Abraham tries to murder his son does not mean that you should too simply because it's in the Bible. Rather, we must be careful to determine which stories are prescriptive examples for us to follow such as trusting God by faith like Abraham, and which descriptive stories are frightening examples for us not to follow such as Adam and Eve trusting Satan over God.

No matter what, the people in Genesis, as well as the rest of Scripture, are positive and negative examples for us to learn from. The bad decisions are examples to warn us by showing us what happens when we sin. The good decisions are examples to welcome us to obey God so that God is glorified and good is done for others as we live under the reign of God's blessing.

#6 Notice the genesis of sexual sins

As soon as sin enters the world, the first thing that happens is that our first parents, who were naked and unashamed, realized

they were naked and covered themselves in shame. Ever since, sex has been marred by sin and shame. As sin marches forward throughout Genesis, the devastation is perhaps most intense in sexual and gender confusion, dysfunction, and abuse.

Genesis is replete with many real-life examples of both sexual health and brokenness. Sexual sin and brokenness in Genesis include:

- Adam and Eve hiding their nakedness in shame, and then God covering their nakedness (3:7, 3:21)
- Homosexuality is culturally embraced and widespread in Sodom and Gomorrah (19:1-38)
- Incest occurs with Lot and his daughters (19:30-38) and Judah with his daughter-in-law Tamar (38:1-30)
- Lust is described when Israel's son Reuben slept with his father's concubine, Bilhah (35:22)
- Adultery appears when Potiphar's wife seeks to seduce Joseph, who resists her advances (39:1-23)
- Rape occurs when Shechem raped Dinah (34:1-2)
- A false accusation of rape is recorded when Potiphar's wife wrongfully accused Joseph of raping her, which leads to his imprisonment (39:1-23)

This same tragic trend continues in our day in everything from pornography to cohabitation, adultery, and every sort of scandalous sexual sin. The results are sin, which we need Jesus to forgive us from, bondage, which we need Jesus to deliver us from, uncleanness, which we need Jesus to purify us from, and shame, which we need Jesus to cleanse us from.

#7 Pay attention to marriage and parenting

In Genesis, there is a wedding and then a war. Soon after Adam and Eve are married, Satan shows up to attack marriage and family. The pages of Genesis reveal that the war on marriage and family shows up in every generation after every wedding. Satan despises love, unity, and joy, which is why he hates marriage so much.

Because Genesis focuses on multiple generations of a family, it reveals a lot about marriage, parenting, and family including:

- The first marriage with Adam and Eve (2:18-25)
- God pre-arranging marriages are found with Adam and Eve (2:18-25) and Isaac and Rebekah (24:1-67)
- Romance in marriage is found between Isaac and Rebekah (24:67) and Jacob and Rachel (29:20)
- The disaster of polygamy is found with Lamech, Adah and Zillah (4:18-24), Jacob, Mahalath and other wives (28:46-49), and Jacob, Leah and Rachel (29:14-29)
- Tragic love triangles are seen with Abram, Sarai and Hagar (16:1-16), and Jacob, Rachel and Leah and maidservants Bilhah and Zilpah (29:31-30:24)
- Examples of disobedient marriages between believers and unbelievers is found to be widespread in the days of Noah (6:1-2)
- A mismatched marriage that caused his parents Isaac and Rebekah much grief was the union between Esau, Judith, and Basemath (26:34-35)
- The sad account of a loveless marriage is noted when Jacob loved his wife Rachel and not his other wife Leah (29:31)
- The pain of divorce is told when Abraham sent off Hagar and Ishmael (21:8-14)
- The occurrence of a second marriage is explained when, after Sarah died, Abraham married Keturah (23:1-2, 25:1)

Because marriage is also a gospel picture of Jesus' relationship with His bride the Church^a, it is not surprising that Satan attacks every marriage, starting with the first.

Regarding parenting, in Genesis 1:28, we read of our first parents Adam and Eve, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful, increase in numbers, fill the earth...'" From this one couple all human beings trace their family origin beginning with the growth of human life through Genesis as demonstrated in the

^a Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 19:6-10

family genealogies. Genesis is careful to state, however, that when children are born, it is by God's gracious provision of blessing.^a Throughout Genesis, children are an important theme, which is also highlighted by the lengthy genealogies. Genesis is also painfully honest about the pains caused by family including:

- The tragedy of sibling rivalry is recorded when Cain killed his brother Abel (4:1-16)
- The grief of barrenness is common throughout the patriarchs including Sarai (11:30, 16:1-2), Rebekah (25:21), and Rachel (29:31), though God eventually answered each of their prayers and enabled them to conceive
- The hardship of single parenting is told in the story of Ishmael being raised by Hagar and God without the involvement of his earthly father Abraham (21:8-21)

Genesis tells us not just what used to happen, but rather what always happens. The same sins and foolishness we see in family systems throughout Genesis sadly continue throughout history. Thankfully, Jesus forgives our sin, and gives us the Holy Spirit to live differently in obedience to God's Word so that our lives and legacies can be blessed by God.

#8 Look for the themes

There are numerous thematic threads that weave Genesis together. In addition to some of the major themes, which we have already examined, the themes of blessing, covenant, good and evil, walking with God, and worship are also very important to understanding Genesis.

Blessing

The word "bless" and its derivatives appear over eighty times throughout the book of Genesis in various English translations, which is more often than any other book of the Bible. Some

^ae.g. Genesis 4:25, 21:1, 25:21, 30:22-24

commentators actually consider God's blessing as the primary theme of the book of Genesis. In Genesis, God's blessing includes such things as His presence, children, possessions, long life, friends, and the ability to persevere and prevail. Throughout Genesis, the opposite of blessings are curses, which come in response to sin and include separation from blessing and the Blessor and judgments such as famine, oppression, and exile.

One of the first things God did for Adam and Eve was "blessed them"^a. God told Abraham that he and his descendants would be blessed so that they could bless the other nations of the earth^b. God's people were then supposed to mediate God's blessing to others, a fact which is most clearly seen in Joseph, who is the great blessing to many nations in the closing chapters of Genesis. Examples of God's people blessing others in Genesis include the following:

- Laban was blessed by Jacob's presence (30:27)
- Potiphar was blessed by Joseph's presence (39:26)
- The prison warden was blessed by Joseph (39:20-23)
- Egypt was blessed by Joseph during the seven-year famine (47:13-26)
- Other nations were blessed by Joseph (41:56-57)
- Jacob blessed Pharaoh (47:7-10)
- Jacob blessed Joseph's two sons Manasseh and Ephraim (48-49)

The New Testament picks up this theme of blessing and connects it to Jesus Christ, who is ultimately the blessing promised to all nations of the earth. This is what Luke records in Acts 3:25-4:2 saying, "You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness. And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the

^aGenesis 1:22 ^bGenesis 12:2-3

Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”

Lastly, Paul connects our blessings to Jesus saying in Galatians 3:14, “that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”

Covenant

The theme covenant is central to Genesis. Covenant is the word God uses to explain His relationship and promises to such men as Adam^a, Noah^b, Abraham^c, Moses^d, and David.^e

The Bible also speaks of covenant relationships not just between people and God, but also people and people.^f Perhaps the most sacred human covenant is the covenant of marriage.^g

The Hebrew word for covenant is *berit*. A covenant is a particular relationship that binds people together as one (God and people, or people and people) by promised terms. Biblical covenants are often sealed with ceremonies that include the shedding of blood to show the solemnity of the covenant and to foreshadow Jesus shedding His blood to secure our New Covenant salvation. Throughout the covenants between God and the elect, the recurring theme is that He will be their God and they will be His people, because He will send Jesus to forgive their sins, which is the essence of the New Covenant.^h

In each covenant, there is a “head”, who is responsible for the oversight and execution of that covenant. In the New Covenant,

^a Hosea 6:7; Romans 5:12-21; I Corinthians 15:21-22 ^b Genesis 6:18, 9:9-17 ^c Genesis 12:2-3, 17:2-21, Exodus 2:24 ^d Exodus 34:10, 34:27-28; Leviticus 24:45 ^e II Chronicles 7:18, 21:7 ^f e.g. I Samuel 18:3; II Kings 11:4; II Chronicles 23:1-3; Nehemiah 1:5; Psalm 55:20; Jeremiah 34:8-15 ^g e.g. Proverbs 2:16, Malachi 2:14 ^h Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20; Romans 11:27; I Corinthians 11:25; II Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 7:22; 8:8-13; 9:15; 12:24

this head is Jesus Christ.^a In each covenant, there are also terms that include consequences for sin, which is the violation of the covenant.^b

The Bible teaches the leadership principle of singular headship and plural leadership. God the Father is the singular Head of the Trinity and serves in plural leadership with the Son and Spirit. Similarly, in the family, the husband is the head, and the husband and wife are together the plural leadership working together to lead the family. The man and woman are equal in every way as image bearers of God. They are both responsible before God, just as God held Adam and Eve responsible for their sin in the Garden. However, the man is held firstly responsible, which occurred when God confronted Adam first, even though Eve was the first to sin.

In Genesis, man was made first as head and given dominion over all Creation and woman was made to help him as co-leader.^c God also calls humanity “man” because it began with the creation of a man as the head of the human race.^d Additionally, the numerous genealogies throughout Genesis are traced through the male line in recognition of the headship of men over their families, generally through the firstborn son, though sometimes another son is chosen either because the oldest son sinned grievously^e, or because of God’s sovereign choice.^f

Therefore, God’s covenant with His people is one of the dominant themes that emerges in Genesis and continues throughout the rest of Scripture. And, while modern Christianity speaks of a personal relationship with Jesus, which is necessary, Genesis also highlights the covenant relationship we have with God as part of His redeemed people and not merely an individual who

^a Colossians 1:18, Colossians 2:10, Colossians 2:19; Ephesians 1:10, Ephesians 1:22, Ephesians 4:15, 5:23 ^b e.g. Deut. 29:1-29; Joshua 7:11-26, 23:16; I Kings 8:23; I Kings 11:11; II Kings 17:35-38, 6:14; Ps. 25:10; Jer. 11:2-10; Heb. 10:29 ^c Genesis 2:15-18; cf. I Corinthians 11:8-9; I Timothy 2:13 ^d Genesis 5:1-2 ^e e.g. Cain killed Abel and so Seth passed him over in Genesis 4:1-25 ^f e.g. though Esau was born first, God chose Jacob in Genesis 25:23

lives and worships in isolation from the rest of God's people. To become a Christian is not only to enter into a covenant with God but also to be adopted into a covenant family with brothers and sisters in Christ.

Good and Evil

The themes of good and evil are woven throughout Genesis, and it's clear that good comes from God and evil come from Satan and sinners who rebel against His creation and commands. The themes of good and evil are typified in the appearance in Genesis 2:9 of the tree of good and evil. To study the themes of good and evil throughout Genesis the following verses will be helpful: 1:10, 1:12, 1:18, 1:21, 1:25, 1:31, 2:9, 2:17, 3:5, 3:22, 4:7, 6:5, 8:21, 13:13, 37:2, and 39:9.

Genesis 3 records the fall of mankind from a good, sinless state to a fallen, sinful state. Despite evil, our good God immediately began pursuing sinners by coming for them and calling out to them. God then promised that Jesus, our good God and Savior, was coming to defeat evil and deliver evildoers.^a

Genesis culminates in beautiful literary fashion in Genesis 50:20 as Moses resolves the conflict between good and evil, where we read of God being sovereign over evil. Joseph informs his brothers that God used their evil for His good saying, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." Evil is big, but our good God is bigger.

Walking with God

Walking with God is a theme that is important to Genesis. Throughout Genesis, we discover that not everyone walks closely with God. Indeed, whole generations such as Noah's, as well as whole cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah, do not walk with God. Genesis is careful to make note of those people who did walk closely with God such as Enoch (5:24), Noah (6:9), and (Abraham

^aGenesis 3:15

15:6).

These examples of walking with, and walking away from God, serve as warnings and encouragements to us all. Every human being must decide if they will walk away from or walk with God. As we see in Genesis, the implications can endure for generations as children tend to follow in their parents' footsteps.

Worship

The worship of God is highlighted throughout the book of Genesis. Examples include Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all building altars to worship God.^a Noah also offered a sacrifice in worship to God upon exiting the Ark once the flood had receded and dry ground appeared.^b

The concepts of Creation and adoration (or worship) are closely linked in Scripture, simply because we were created for the purpose of glorifying God by worshipping Him. The following Scriptures help to connect the great themes of Creation and worship, often doing so by showing that Creation is evidence of God's love, which elicits our loving response to our loving God:

- Psalm 136:1-9 (NIV) – "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever. to Him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever. who by his understanding made the heavens, His love endures forever. who spread out the earth upon the waters, His love endures forever. who made the great lights - His love endures forever. the sun to govern the day, His love endures forever. the moon and stars to govern the night; His love endures forever."
- Revelation 4:11 (NIV) – "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

^a Genesis 12:7-8, 13:18, 22:9, 26:25, 35:1-7 ^b Genesis 8:18-21

Conversely, the opposite of worshipping the Creator of all things is worshipping created things like people, sex, fame, money, food, comfort, or demons. Because we were made to worship, if we fail to worship the Creator, we fall into worshipping the created, as Paul clearly states in Romans 1:21-25, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”

#9 Find the literary patterns in Genesis

The more you get to know someone, the more familiar you are with how they communicate. Over time, you pick up patterns in how they speak or write, and it becomes easier to sense the flow of their thought and what they are trying to communicate. Likewise, Moses, who authored Genesis, provides for us some literary patterns that will help us make sense of the book if we are attentive to them. The following literary patterns that I will briefly mention will help you become more familiar with communication tendencies throughout the book.

Prominent names often appear together

Throughout Genesis it is common to find prominent names spoken of together in couplets. Examples include Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Abraham and Lot, Isaac and Ishmael, Esau and Jacob, and Joseph and his brothers.

Names of key people often describe much of their life

Throughout Genesis, it is also common that people's names are indicative of their life as God sovereignly bestowed their names. For example, Adam means mankind, Eve means giver of life, Cain means wanderer, Enoch means dedication or consecration, and Isaac means laughter. If you find people in the Bible who you want to study more deeply, start by researching the meaning of their name.

Like father, like son

Another literary pattern throughout Genesis is that sons often follow both the good and bad patterns of their fathers. For example, both Abraham and Isaac pretend that their wife is their sister.^a Likewise, Abraham and Isaac both had a dispute with the people in Gerar over the ownership of a well.^b Both Abraham and Isaac entered into covenants with Abimelech.^c Also, Jacob's sons trick the trickster^d, and Lamech is a murderer descended from the first murderer, Cain^e. Ultimately, the pattern of children being like their parents is a foreshadowing to the New Covenant in which God the Father adopts us into His family and shapes our character to be like Him once we are born again.

#10 Stop to pray and memorize as the Spirit leads

According to Deuteronomy 6:1-9, the wisdom of the Pentateuch in general, including Genesis in particular, is not just to be written on tablets of stone or scrolls of paper but also on the heart of those people who love God. The writing of God's Word upon our hearts is accomplished as we meditate on Scripture throughout our day, thereby allowing the Holy Spirit to impress His wisdom upon us. Therefore, it is important for you to not only read Genesis repeatedly, but also memorize those verses that stand

^a Genesis 12:10-20, 20:1-18, 26:1-35 ^b Genesis 21:22-34, 26:17-25 ^c Genesis: 21:22-34, 26:26-31 ^d Genesis: 27:1-29 ^e Genesis 4:1-24

out to you and take time throughout your day to contemplate the themes, images, and verses that God burdens your soul to better understand. God intends this book, and every book of the Bible, to not merely be information for your mind but transformation for your life. For that to happen, the Word of God needs to live in you so that the Spirit of God can work through you. The same God who worked through Moses to write Genesis wants to work in you to experience the goodness of God's blessing throughout your life.

IN THE BEGINNING

CHAPTER 2

Personal and Group Study Guide for Genesis 15-26

Why Should We Trust God's Promises to Us and Our Family?

Scripture to Read: Genesis 15:1-21

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

Genesis 15:6 - "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

Commentary:

We now come to one of the most significant chapters in the Bible recounting God's call of Abram. In this chapter, the vital themes of faith and covenant appear.

When we want to repeat something, we create a prototype that serves as a pattern and precedent that is copied.

When it comes to faith, our prototype is Abraham. In Jesus' day, they said, "Abraham is our father"^a. To this day, the three major world religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all point to him as the father of their faith tradition.

Abraham believed God internally and obeyed God externally by doing what God commanded. That is true faith. Abraham models biblical faith for us. Faith is an internal conviction leading to an external action. What makes Abraham's faith amazing is one simple fact. Abraham's knowledge was minimal, but his faith was massive. In comparison, we tend to know a LOT more and believe a

^a John 8:39

LOT less.

Genesis opens with God speaking and preparing creation for mankind by the power of His Word. Throughout Genesis, God has thus far spoken to Adam, Noah, and Abram. In Genesis 15:1, God again speaks to Abram in a vision, preparing the man for covenant as He had prepared creation for the man through the shaping power of His Word. Whereas later in Genesis 20:7^a Abram is clearly called a prophet, here he is cast in that role as the Word of the Lord had come to him, a phrase repeated some 221 times throughout the Old Testament when God gives His Word to His prophet.

In Genesis 15:2, we also witness the first time that Abram spoke to the Lord in response. Until this point when God spoke to him, Abram simply believed God and obeyed Him. As Abram's relationship with God has grown and matured, he now takes the liberty of respectfully inquiring of how God will provide for him. Abram's speech may indicate a wavering in his faith as, when he is silent, it appears Abram acts in faith and, when he questions God, it appears that doubt is creeping into his mind. If there is doubt, it may be in part because God had already promised Abram a son earlier^b and some 25 years would pass between God's promise of a son and the birth of that son, Isaac. Since the name Abram means "exalted father", it could have meant that every day of his adult life was painful as he and his wife were unable to have a son, which could have caused his faith in God's promise of a son to waiver as real faith is rarely perfect faith.

Regarding Abraham, Romans 4:18 says, "In hope he believed against hope". When you believe the possible is possible, that is hope. When you believe the impossible is possible, that is hope beyond hope. For example, a healthy, young married couple believing they can have a baby is hope, but when Abraham and Sarah, who are barren and old enough to be great-grandparents wait 25 additional years to have a baby, that is hope beyond hope.

God poetically promised to be Abram's protector and provider.

^a cf. Psalm 105:8-15 ^b Genesis 12:2

God promised that, though Abram was childless, and his wife Sarai was barren, they would have a son, and through that son a nation of people would be birthed. Genesis 15:6 reports Abram's response to God's Word, which is among the most important verses in the Bible saying, "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

Genesis 15:6 becomes a verse that is central to the New Testament doctrine of faith in general and Paul's doctrine of justification by faith.^a Additionally, Jesus' brother James quoted Genesis 15:6 to teach that true faith in God results in good works in life with God.^b

God's covenant with Abram was confirmed with a sacrifice and the shedding of the blood. The enacting of covenants in the Old Testament are often referred to as the cutting of a covenant as they are instituted in blood showing their life and death seriousness. All of this foreshadows the New Covenant of our salvation, which was confirmed with Jesus' sacrifice of His own life on the cross and the shedding of His blood. In two-party covenants, the participants would both pass through the sacrifice as an oath, but in this instance, God alone passes through as this is a one-party covenant which God promises to fulfill no matter what.

God then promised Abram that, though his descendants would inherit the Promised Land, it would not be in his lifetime, but rather only after a future 400-year exile in Egypt. In this revelation, God foretold the entire account of the 430-year captivity in Egypt recorded in Exodus, which is the next book of the Bible. God then marked out the boundaries of the Promised Land, which also coincide with the Garden of Eden^c and the nation we know as Israel today.

Dig Deeper:

- What additional light does Nehemiah 9:7-8 shed on God's faithfulness toward Abram?

^a Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6 ^b James 2:23-24 ^c Genesis 2:10-14

- What additional light does Hebrews 11:11-12 shed on Abram's faith?
- Read Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, and James 2:23-24 in light of their surrounding contexts to discover the implications of Genesis 15:6 and what theologians refer to as justification by faith alone through grace alone in Christ alone.
- What additional insight does 2 Peter 3:9 give about God's patience as we, like Abraham and Sarah, wait for God to fulfill all His promises to us?

Talk it Out. Walk it Out.

- What do you discover about God in Genesis 15?
- How does Galatians 3:7 directly apply the promise to Abraham to you as a Christian believer in Jesus Christ as the God of Abraham?
- What does God's revelation of the Hebrew people's 400 years of exile in Egypt tell you about both His knowledge of and rule over human history?
- What can we learn about the difference between God's will and God's timing from Abraham and Sarah's long wait for a son?
- What things have you had to wait the longest for God to do in your life?
- What things are you still waiting in faith for God to do in your life?

NOTES

How is God Faithful Even When We are Faithless?

Scripture to Read: Genesis 16:1-16

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

Genesis 16:11-12 – “The angel of the LORD also said to her: ‘You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.’”

Commentary:

Throughout God’s dealings with Adam, Noah, and Abraham, we have witnessed a pattern of God speaking to them, calling them into covenant, establishing them as the head of a new humanity, promising to bless them, and inviting the men to respond to Him in faith. We then see each man falter in faith and sin against the Lord, despite His patient kindness to them.

In Genesis 16, we see this pattern repeated in yet another mini-Fall of sorts as, instead of two trees, one of which is forbidden, we now have two women, one of which is forbidden. After the establishment of God’s covenant in Genesis 15, Abram sought to take matters into his own hands by bearing a son with his Egyptian maidservant, Hagar. The faithless plot was conceived by Abram’s wife, Sarai, who, like her first mother Eve, failed to trust the simple words of God and at least inferred that God had not kept His promise to her.^a Their actions were likely motivated at least in part by the fact that the elderly Sarai had been waiting 10-plus years since God had promised them a child.

Abram married Hagar in addition to Sarai and the pattern of polygamy among believers is here introduced for the first time in Scripture. The results of this polygamy are truly tragic, as is the case with other instances of adultery and polygamy in Scripture. God’s intention is that each man would have one wife.^b The first

^a Genesis 16:2 ^b Genesis 2:18; Matthew 19:4-6

man to take more than one wife was the godless man Lamech.^a When practiced, polygamy is wrought with favoritism, fighting, jealousy, and mistreatment.^b This also helps to explain why, in the New Testament, church leaders who serve as the pattern for Christian families are to be one-woman men.^c Also, the Lord Jesus has one bride, the Church, and serves as the perfect example of fidelity to the covenant of marriage.

Abram slept with Hagar, and she bore him a son. And, in bitter irony, Sarai blamed Abram for the rift in their family because he slept with Hagar as Sarai wanted him too. Much like Adam, Abram then allowed Sarai to lead their family and do as she pleased to Hagar rather than leading his family and caring for his son. Sarai mistreated Hagar, which caused Hagar to flee from her. Moses carefully paints this picture in very sad terms, showing the mistreated Hagar sitting alone and heartbroken near a spring in the desert.

Thankfully, God intervenes as the hero of both this chapter of Genesis and all the rest of Scripture. Just as God came searching for Adam and Eve in the Garden, the angel of the Lord (likely Jesus Christ in a Christophony where He shows up in history before His birth to Mary) came searching for Hagar in the desert. The angel of the Lord spoke to her to inquire of her circumstances and Hagar explained that she was running from the abusive Sarai. The angel of the Lord instructed Hagar to return to Sarai and trust that God would protect her and provide for her and her son like He had Abram. God also promised that her son would become the father of a great nation because he was a son of Abram, though not the son of the promise as that would eventually be Isaac. God also told Hagar that his name would be Ishmael, which means God hears, because God had heard her weeping and responded with kindness. God then promises that Ishmael would be a “wild donkey of a man” and that he would be a warrior in hostility with his brothers, who

^a Genesis 4:19-24 ^b e.g. Genesis 25:28, 27:1-45, 35:22, 38:18-28; II Samuel 3:2-5, 13:1-29, 15:1-18:33; I Kings 11:1-4 ^c I Timothy 3:2,12

would descend from Abram.

In this account, the birth of Hagar's son is announced by an angel much like the birth of Jesus is proclaimed by the angel Gabriel in Luke 1. Both announcements are given to the mother (Hagar and Mary), both women are greeted, both are told that they will bear a son, both are given God's favor, both are given their son's name, the future achievements of each son are promised, and the women both respond with thanks to God.

Ishmael was born to a Hebrew father and Egyptian mother and became the father of the Arab nations that, to this day, are in hostility with Jews and Christians alike as promised. And they are also a very wealthy people as God has blessed them with the wealth of oil.

As mentioned earlier, there is some question as to who the "angel of the Lord" is in Genesis 16. The word for angel generally means messenger and the Old Testament seems to distinguish between "an angel of the Lord", which refers to one of God's angels, and "the angel of the Lord", which seems to refer to God Himself coming down.^a In this section "the angel of the Lord" may in fact be Jesus because of Hagar's response. In Genesis 16:13-14, Hagar named "the angel of the Lord" El Roi, which means "the God who sees me." Therefore, it seems likely that Jesus Himself came down to comfort and bless Hagar and she recognized that it was God who had appeared to her in love. If so, Jesus may here be sitting with a woman at a well much like He did during his incarnation with the Samaritan woman in John 4, who was likewise not a Hebrew but was a sexually sinful woman.

Lastly, in this we see that God does love the Arabs, who today are more likely to be Muslim than Christian, in part because of this great family feud that began with Sarai and Hagar and continues to this day in great wars and conflicts throughout the world, particularly in the Middle East.

^a Judges 6:11-4, 13:22

Dig Deeper:

- How does Proverbs 30:21-23 explain the conflict between Hagar and Sarai?
- How is the story of the angel of the Lord sitting with Hagar reminiscent of Jesus sitting with the Samaritan woman in John 4?
- How is this angelic birth announcement much like others in Scripture such as Isaac (Genesis 17:9), Samson (Judges 13:3,5,7), John the Baptizer (Luke 1:11-20) and Jesus (Luke 1:26-28)?
- Who do you believe “the angel of the Lord” was that spoke to Hagar?
- God promised Abraham both a son and many descendants. According to Romans 4 and Galatians 3:6-8, how are Christians the descendants promised to Abraham?
- How does Acts 17:25 help make sense of why taking matters into our own hands rather than leaving them in God’s hands never works?

Talk it Out. Walk it Out.

- In what ways is the story of Abram and Sarai a repeat of Adam and Eve?
- Note the numerous times the word “I” or “me” is used. How does this reveal their selfishness which leads to sin?
- What lessons can be learned about the implications of sexual sin from this chapter?
- In this chapter God is called “El-Roi” which means the “God who sees me.” This is the only time in the Bible that someone names God, as God always names people. Nonetheless, how does it encourage you to know that no matter what you are going through, even when you feel lonely and abandoned, God is still watching you, with you, and caring for you?
- Ishmael fathered 12 sons in Genesis 25:13-15 (not unlike the 12 tribes of Israel) and the two families became two nations and the Arab-Israeli conflict ensues to this day. What does this teach about the importance of obeying God for generations to avoid suffering great pain?

IN THE BEGINNING

NOTES

How is God Faithful to Families for Generations?

Scripture to Read: Genesis 17:1-27

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

Genesis 17:11 – “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.”

Commentary:

Following God’s covenant with Abram in Genesis 15, and Abram’s sexual sin with Hagar in Genesis 16, God then institutes male circumcision with Abram as the sign of the covenant in Genesis 17. The reason why God chose to mark His men on this part of their anatomy is not revealed to us. However, it makes sense as, for men, this is of great importance to them, the means by which they conceive children, and the cause of some of their most grievous sins, as we have seen in Genesis and throughout human history.

Circumcision was performed either with a sharp knife or stone. Circumcision began in Genesis 17 with Abram who was 99 years of age as a sign of his covenant with God, much like the rainbow was the sign of God’s covenant with Noah. God spoke to Abram and Abram responded to God’s command in faith, falling down on his face to worship God. God then changed his name from Abram which means “exalted father” to Abraham which means “father of a multitude” as the time for God to fulfill His promise of a son for Abram was very near. God then described His covenant with Abraham to include Abraham’s descendants.

God also gave Abraham the terms of the covenant which included Abraham and his descendants trusting God by faith in obedience by walking with God as Enoch and Noah had. The sign of their faith in God and membership in the covenant was to be circumcision of the male flesh of every generation, and all their household under their headship.

Theologically, in the covenant of circumcision, we are given significant insight into the doctrines of God’s sovereignty and

human responsibility working together. In the covenant of circumcision God pledges to be a trustworthy God. He also calls His people to obey Him by faith as they are created by Him to be responsible moral agents.

God then told Abraham that his wife's name would be changed from Sarai which means "contentious" to Sarah which means "princess". God also promised that through Sarah the princess would come kings and the ultimate fulfillment to come would be the birth of Jesus Christ, who is the King of Kings promised to Sarah's great-grandson Judah in Genesis 49:10.

God appeared to Abraham, something that happens on only a few occasions in Genesis (12:7, 18:1, 26:2, 26:24, 35:9). Like chapter 15, Abraham spoke to God in unbelief rather than simply obeying Him by faith. Subsequently, in yet another mini-Fall, Abraham laughed at God in distrust that he and Sarah could conceive as God had promised.

God kindly restated His promise to Abraham that he would have a son, even instructing Abraham to name him Isaac which means "laughter", as God would get the last laugh. Summarily, God's portion of the covenant to Abraham consisted of offspring^a and eternal faithfulness.^b God also kindly answered Abraham's request to bless his other son, Ishmael, even though he was not the son of the promise or covenant. God also promised that 12 princes would come from Ishmael in contrast to the 12 tribes of Israel and they are listed in Genesis 25:12-26.

Abraham immediately obeyed God as Moses makes clear with the statement "On that very day..." Abraham was circumcised at the age of 99 along with every member of his household as God had commanded. He did this because God promised that any male who was not cut in circumcision would be cut off altogether by God.

God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17 has puzzled theologians because God had already entered a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. The three most likely reasons for both

^a Genesis 17:4-6 ^b Genesis 17:7-8

accounts are that God was either expanding the covenant of land in Genesis 15 with offspring in Genesis 17, God was again restating His covenant with Abraham after he sinned with Hagar in Genesis 16, or God was expanding His covenant promise to Abraham to not be the father of one great nation (12:2), but in fact the father of many nations (17:5).

Throughout the rest of Scripture, the concepts of covenant and circumcision are expanded to include we who are Christians as the descendants of Abraham by new birth. Circumcision pointed to the circumcision that God brings to our hearts through His covenant relationship with us.^a Those with hearts circumcised by the Holy Spirit are truly Abraham's descendants as they like him live in covenant relationship with God by faith in Jesus Christ.^b

Dig Deeper:

- Circle in your Bible each of the occurrences of the word “covenant” in this section.
- Make note of what God promises to do in the covenant.
- Make note of what is required of Abraham and his descendants in the covenant.
- What does Paul's teaching about God choosing Isaac over Ishmael reveal about election in Romans 9:6-9?
- Why does Paul stress that Abraham had faith first and then received the sign of the covenant (circumcision) in his commentary on Genesis 17 in Romans 4?
- According to I Corinthians 7:11-19 and Galatians 5:1-12, 6:12-18 do Christian men today need to be circumcised?

Talk it Out. Walk it Out.

- God invited Abraham to walk with Him (17:1) much like Adam, Enoch, and Noah before him. What does it look like for you to walk with God practically?
- When God commands Abraham to raise his children and

^a Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Ezekiel 44:7-9; Romans 2:25-29; Colossians 2:11 ^b Romans 4; Galatians 3:6-8

grandchildren in faith, what example is being set for all believers, including yourself?

- How are baptism and communion signs of the New Covenant we are in with God?
- Since Genesis 17, Jews have circumcised their sons on the eighth day as that was the day chosen for their father Isaac (17:12) and Arabs have circumcised their sons at the age of 13 as that was the age at which their father Ishmael was circumcised (17:25). What does this stark difference teach us about how generations after us might follow in our example, be it good or bad, as part of our legacy?

NOTES

IN THE BEGINNING

Is God Tolerant or Intolerant of Our Sexual Sin?

Scripture to Read: Genesis 18:1-19:38

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

Genesis 19:24 – “Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah – from the LORD out of the heavens.”

Commentary:

In Genesis 18, three men appear to Abraham and since one is repeatedly called the Lord and Abraham worshiped Him, it was probably Jesus, before His birth to Mary, and two angels. The location at which Abraham is visited is the same place he had settled in 13:18, as he had apparently remained in obedience to God who called Him to that place. In this, we see a pattern that emerges as God reveals Himself in various miraculous ways throughout Genesis. They include speaking (1:3), visions (15:1), and angels (16:7).

Genesis 18 begins with God’s visit to Abraham at which time He again promised the birth of Isaac, this time within the year. Sarah was eavesdropping on the conversation between Abraham and the Lord and, like her husband did in Genesis 17, she too laughed at the Lord. She likely did so because, at this point, her husband was nearing 100 years of age and she was likely around 90, had been barren her entire life, and possibly had even completed menopause, all of which meant there was no possible way, humanly speaking, for them to have a child. God again kindly restated His promise that a son would be born within the year because nothing is too hard for the Lord.

As the Lord and the two “men” traveling with Him got up to leave Abraham, they then revealed to him the impending destruction of the nearby city of Sodom. This is likely because throughout both the Old and New Testament, God requires at least two witnesses in the condemning of a sinner. The Lord remained to discuss the impending judgment as the two “men” went into the city to investigate it on His behalf.

Knowing the justice of God, Abraham feared that perhaps

the godly people in the city would be wrongly harmed amidst the destruction of the godless. The Lord assured Abraham that the city did not have more than a few righteous people and that they would be spared as Noah and his family were in the days of the flood. Genesis 18 closes by setting the stage for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19.

In Genesis 19, the two angels whom the Lord had sent to investigate the sexual sin of Sodom and Gomorrah were welcomed for hospitality by Lot as they had been cared for by Abraham. As they rested in Lot's home, the perverted men of the city surrounded the home demanding that Lot's guests be sent out for homosexual sex and possibly even to be gang raped by the crowd of men.

Lot responded by offering the disgusting solution that he would send out his two virgin daughters to instead be gang raped by the crowd. In this, we see the evil not only in the men, but also in Lot who both chose to live in that city and was willing to hand his own daughters over to be assaulted.

Thankfully, God intervened and blinded the perverted men. The two "men" then told Lot to get his family out of town before God rightly reduced the hellish town to ashes. Unlike Abraham who repeatedly obeyed God immediately, Lot was still in the city the next morning with his family and had to be literally walked out of town by the two "men". Once safely out of the city, one of the angels commanded the family to run for their lives without looking back or stopping. Lot then begged the angel to permit him to instead flee to a small nearby town called Zoar (which means small) and the angel kindly agreed to permit Lot and his family to do so.

Lot and his family barely made it out of town in time as God rained down burning sulfur (literally burning asphalt) on Sodom and Gomorrah, killing all the people, and destroying their land much like in the days of Noah. Lot's wife looked back in sinful unbelief, pining for their old life in the world rather than trusting God to save her in faith according to Jesus in Luke 17:32-33. We know nothing of Lot's wife, but she may have been from Sodom, or

at least agreed with the lifestyle there. This would explain why Lot settled there and why she looked back as they fled, regretting their departure as she may have been a very vile woman.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah ends by stating that Abraham stood off to witness the smoke rise from the former cities and that Lot and his family were spared only because God blessed them for being associated with Abraham who prayed for Lot in Genesis 18:16-33. We are told that God remembered Abraham as He had Noah.^a

Today, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is under great revision by people who claim to be practicing homosexual Christians. These people seek to teach that God sanctions and blessed homosexual sex, which directly contradicts Scripture.^b They even go so far as to teach that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for reasons other than homosexual sin, often stating that God was angry because of the Sodomites' inhospitality to the two "men" who were visiting the city.

Such twisted interpretations are simply evidence that God has handed them over to their sin and their minds have become so corrupted that they cannot see the truth as Paul clearly states in Romans 1:18-27. And, while God can and does forgive repentant homosexual sinners, the Bible is clear that homosexual conduct is deplorable to God who made us male and female, married us male and female, and intends sexual contact to only occur between one married male and his female wife.

Since the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is the most graphic account of God's response to sexual sin in general and homosexual sin in particular, we need to consider the reasons why the sin judged in Sodom was homosexual sex.

- The sexual sin of Sodom and Gomorrah has long been held to be homosexuality as our English word sodomy indicates
- Earlier, in Genesis 13:12-13, when Lot chose to live in Sodom,

^a Genesis 8:1, 18:29 ^b Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; I Corinthians 6:9-11; I Timothy 1:9-10; Jude 17

God warned Abram about its wickedness in the days preceding the visit of the two angels saying, “Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.”

- Genesis 18:20-21 records God’s account of the great sin saying, “Then the LORD said, ‘The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.’”
- Even Lot said their sin was wicked, which is saying a lot as his answer was the “less” sinful solution of offering his own daughters to be raped as in Genesis 19:7a-8a he says, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them.”
- In Genesis 19:5 it says, “They [the men of Sodom] called to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.’” Some have argued that the word rightly here translated “sex” does not mean sex, but when used elsewhere in Genesis it simply does (e.g. 4:1, 4:17, 4:25, 24:16). Even in this same chapter of Genesis 19, the same word is used to explain that Lot’s daughters had not had sex with any men (19:8) which makes it abundantly clear that the men simply wanted to have sex with the “men” in Lot’s house.
- The parallel account of Genesis 19 in the book of Judges 19 likewise speaks of homosexual gang rape, which is likewise condemned there also.
- And, if there should be any question as to whether or not the sin of Sodom was homosexual sex, Jude 7 is emphatic on this point saying, “In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those

who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.”

In summary, the account of Sodom and Gomorrah from Genesis 18:16-19:29 shows God’s righteous judgment of sexual sin in general, and homosexual sin in particular. We also again see the faith of Abraham. Though Abraham knew that Sodom and Gomorrah would be destroyed, and rightly feared that his nephew Lot and Lot’s family could be destroyed, Abraham did not run into town to warn them and save their life. Instead, in faith, Abraham prayed to God for their lives to be spared and went to bed to sleep soundly in faith that God would answer his prayer. And, when he awoke the next morning to see the cities reduced to ashes, Abraham did not doubt that God spared Lot and did not venture into Sodom to investigate if he was indeed still alive but rather simply trusted God.

In the closing account of Genesis 19:30-38, we then witness one of the most troubling and bizarre stories in all of Scripture. There, the story of Lot closely resembles the story of Noah. After being spared widespread judgment that rained down from Heaven, both Noah and Lot get drunk and end up naked and passed out. After seeing God destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for sexual sin, and after God spared Lot though he sought to also commit sexual sin by offering to hand his two virgin daughters over to a crowd of homosexual male rapists, Lot actually impregnated both of his own daughters.

After seeing the devastation that God brought to Sodom and Gomorrah and not trusting that God would protect him as he already had once, Lot moved into the mountains to live alone in a cave with his daughters. Lot had no wife as she had died, and the girls had no husbands as they were living alone with their father. Fearing they would never get pregnant, the girls got their father drunk and had sex with him. The sons they bore by their own father were the heads of the Moabite and Ammonite races that later became bitter enemies of God’s people.^a

^a e.g. Numbers 23-25; II Kings 3

Lot is morally culpable for the incest because he is apparently a very poor head of his family. In Genesis 19:14, Lot's sons-in-law laughingly mocked him when he told them that God was going to judge the sin in their town and his two daughters conspire to usurp his headship. In Genesis 19:30-38, he has his daughters living in a cave, oblivious to their desire to marry and have children, without a plan to give them in marriage as was his duty, and they have apparently learned to share his sexual disrespect for them as they together agree that getting their father drunk, having sex with him, and bearing his children is a good idea. Additionally, the girls share the values of the world and not the Lord^a, which they learned growing up in the sinfully sick city of Sodom which Lot chose for them. The point is painfully clear – if believers raise their children in the world, their children will grow up immoral, confused, and perverted.

The theological point of this story is that Lot was no more of a righteous man than the other men who perished in Sodom. But, through Abraham, Lot was given grace and spared the wrath of God. And while we may protest God's sparing of Lot, the point is very simply that, if God were not gracious, everyone on the earth would end up going the way of Sodom.

But, in time, God uses what was evil for good as only He can. Eventually, out of the lineage of the godless Moabite race will come a woman named Ruth, and subsequently Jesus Christ.^b

Dig Deeper:

- How do Romans 4:19 and Hebrews 11:11-12 help shed light on why Sarah laughed at the thought of getting pregnant?
- What can be learned about God's holiness, righteousness, and justice from this chapter?
- If you would like to study the recent archaeological evidence that Sodom and Gomorrah actually existed visit <https://www.studyfinds.org/sodom-gomorrah-fire-brimstone-meteor/>

^a Genesis 19:31 ^b Ruth 4:18-22; Matthew 1:5

- What light does II Peter 2:4-10a shed on the story of Lot's rescue?
- According to Jude 7, what are we supposed to learn from God's dealing with Sodom and Gomorrah?

Talk it Out. Walk it Out.

- In Genesis 18:16-33, Abraham prayed for God to spare his nephew Lot and his family from the destruction in Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 19:29 says that God remembered Abraham's prayer, which is why he rescued Lot. What things can you learn about prayer from this story?
- What wisdom can parents and children glean from the story of Lot and his daughters?
- What does the story of Lot reveal to us about God, particularly His grace?
- Why does God treat Abraham and the inhabitants of Sodom so differently?
- What does Genesis 18 reveal to us about God, particularly His mercy and justice?

NOTES

IN THE BEGINNING

Can God Deliver Me From a Mess I'm In?

Scripture to Read: Genesis 20:1-18

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

Genesis 20:17-18 – “Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again, for the LORD had closed up every womb in Abimelech's household because of Abraham's wife Sarah.”

Commentary:

Anyone who is married will tell you how easy it is to fall into bad routines and old ruts, even though it always makes things worse and never better. In the marriage of Abraham and Sarah, we see this principle playing out painfully.

In Genesis 20:1-18, we read of the account of Abraham moving and again giving away his lovely wife, now around 90 years of age, as he had previously in Genesis 12:10-20. Fortunately, God intervened like one of the big guys in a mob movie through a dream that revealed to Abimelech, who was king of Gerar, that Sarah was in fact married and that God was going to kill him and his family if he touched her sexually. Moses tells the story in such a way as to stress the innocence of Abimelech (e.g. 20:6). It is also clear that Abraham is a coward and that Sarah joins him in a lie. The story shows that, sometimes, there are people who do not know God that behave better than the people who do know God. Of course, things should not be this way, but sadly sometimes they are.

In 20:7, God declares that Abraham is a prophet, which is the first mention of a prophet in the Bible. Until this point, God has been the only one functioning like a prophet, calling creation into existence by the His Word, and speaking to His people directly but not much speaking through His people, which is what prophets do. God uses Abraham's sin to evangelize Abimelech, telling Abimelech that Abraham will pray for him, and that those prayers will be answered. Since we've all had moments like Abraham, it is an encouragement that God can take our mess and turn it into our

ministry.

The poor Abimelech who has been lied to and tricked, asked Abraham why he had lied to him and put him in harm's way with God. Abraham answered that he feared that Abimelech might harm him to take Sarah and so he sought to protect himself in unbelief rather than trusting for God to protect him as God had promised and demonstrated previously. In a selfish admission, when it came down to the suffering of himself or his wife, Abraham was willing to cause his wife harm to avoid his own. Abraham then tried to weasel his way out of an embarrassing situation by telling a half-truth that sounded more like Adam's likewise lame excuse for sin instead of simple repentance.

Amazingly, Abimelech was a kind man as he blessed Abraham giving him sheep, cattle and slaves. He also invited Abraham to live wherever he pleased on Abimelech's vast land. To top it off, Abimelech also gave Abraham 1,000 shekels of silver, which is around 25 pounds. Today, that would be somewhere north of \$6 million in silver. At this point in the story, the godless Abimelech certainly appears as a better man than Abraham, which is more evidence that he was saved by God's grace and not his great works.

Then, as God promised, Abraham prayed to God. We then read that God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his slave girls so that they could again conceive children. Apparently, God had closed the womb of every woman in Abimelech's household as a consequence and warning for Abimelech having taken Sarah.

The point of this story is to again show that the fulfillment of God's promise was accomplished solely by God's sovereign and gracious provision. Up to this point in Genesis, God has repeatedly told Abraham that his son would come through his wife Sarah. Yet, for the second time Abraham essentially gave her away to marry another man. Abraham nearly lost both his wife and his promised son! And, yet again, God had to fix Abraham's mess, prevent Sarah from sleeping with another man, and return Sarah to Abraham so that they could have the son of the promise to fulfill God's covenant with them and all nations of the earth. If Abraham's plan

failed, Jesus Christ could not enter into human history through the promised family line of Abraham and Sarah, which just goes to show that one sin can alter history, as it already had with Adam. Simply, God is faithful to accomplish His promises even when his sinful people complicate his plans through disobedience. Often, He has to save us from ourselves.

Dig Deeper:

- Look ahead to Isaac's repetition of this very sin (Genesis 26:7-11). What does this reveal about how our sin can set an example and pattern for generations in our family?
- What does Leviticus 18:9 and 20:7 later reveal about this type of relationship?
- How is this story an illustration of the principle in 2 Timothy 2:13?
- In this story, God served as the intercessor to rescue and save. Look up the following Scriptures to see how Jesus Christ does this very thing for us: Hebrews 7:26; Isaiah 53:12; Romans 8:34.

Talk it Out. Walk it Out.

- Ladies, what are your thoughts about how Sarah behaved in this scenario?
- Men, what are your thoughts about how Abraham behaved in this scenario?
- Why is it so important that Christians not only concern themselves with their well-being, but also their witness to others who do not yet know God?
- How is it helpful that Moses, in writing Genesis, is so honest about the fears, faults, and flaws of some of the most renowned believers in human history?
- What are some unique things we learn about the character of God from this account?

IN THE BEGINNING

NOTES

Does God Choose Some People but Not Others?

Scripture to Read: Genesis 21:1-21

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

Genesis 21:1,3 – “Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised...Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him.”

Commentary:

The book of Genesis has been building in anticipation since chapter 12 for the birth of Abraham’s promised son, Isaac. In Genesis 21, that hope is realized some 25 long and arduous years later. Abraham’s son was born just when and how God promised, and Abraham circumcised his son at eight days of age just as the Lord had commanded. This reminds fathers that we do not just sire sons, but rather are commanded by our Father to father them in covenant relationship with the Lord.

Sarah responded with expectedly great joy as the elderly barren woman was finally holding her baby boy by a miracle of God. Previously, she laughed in mockery of God^a, and now she laughs in worship of God. Her latter joyful response is much like her descendant, Mary, years later at the birth of the promised Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Abraham and Sarah (now 100 and 90 years old respectively) named the boy Isaac, meaning laughter, just as God has told them. Sarah had previously laughed when God said they would be parents. On this occasion, she laughed in joyous worship for the grace of God that brought her a son, which was quite unlike her previous laughter of unbelief that basically mocked the promises of God.

As Isaac grew, tensions again escalated between Sarah and Hagar who had born Abraham’s first son, Ishmael. In this, we see the pains of polygamy, which is a theme throughout Scripture.

^a Genesis 18:10-15

God told us in Genesis 1-2 that marriage was for only for one man and one woman alone by divine design. When Isaac was about three years of age, Ishmael, who was in his late teens, curiously mocked and laughed at Isaac. This theme of brotherly conflict is throughout Genesis and includes Cain and Abel as well as Ham, Shem and Japheth

The mockery of her young son infuriated Sarah, though it was in fact the same kind of laughter she had previously directed at God. Everyone in the storyline of Genesis loves the boy Ishmael (the Lord, the angel, Hagar, Abraham) except Sarah, who despised him. Nonetheless, God permitted Sarah to send Hagar and Ishmael away, and promised Abraham that, though Ishmael was not part of the covenant line that would bring for the Jesus Christ, he would be cared for and protected. In this way, God may not have been so much discarding Ishmael and Hagar as removing them from an increasingly tense and unpleasant family situation with Sarah.

Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael out into the desert with only some food and a few gallons of water, which is probably all they could carry. While his actions appear to be thoughtless and cruel (which they may have been), it is also possible that Abraham simply believed God's promise to take care of the boy and bless him as he already had blessed Abraham and those associated with him, such as Lot. The Scriptures simply do not say whether Abraham acted in trust or terror.

Out of water, and wandering in the desert with her son, Hagar sat in despair anticipating that she and her son would die of thirst as the boy wept. In a repeat of events prior in Genesis 16, "the angel of the Lord" (who is probably the pre-incarnate Jesus in what is called a Christophony appearance) spoke to her. From Heaven, He promised to care for her and her son, make them into a great nation, and then provided a well for them to drink from. God remained true to his promise regarding Ishmael and the boy grew up in the desert as a skilled archer. His marriage to an Egyptian woman is likely indicator that he did not worship God but lived by his own courage and strength, much like his Arab descendants to

this day who do not worship Jesus Christ but look to Ishmael as their father. Curiously, this region in Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Mohammed, who is a descendant of Ishmael and father of all Arabs. It is near the Muslim holy site of Mecca, where the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ visited Ishmael and Hagar. The site of this well is also a Muslim holy site called the spring of Zamzan.

Having now calmed the tensions in the storyline of Abraham's families with their conflicts resolved, the master storyteller Moses has reserved the climactic test of Abraham's faith for the near sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22.

Dig Deeper:

- What does Hebrews 11:11-12 reveal about the age and condition of Abraham and Sarah when their son is born? How does God's patience to fulfill the promise of a son make it obvious that this was a miracle?
- What light does Galatians 4:21-31 shed on why God allowed Ishmael to be sent away while Isaac remained with Abraham? Make special note of 4:30 which declares Moses' account to be "Scripture" with the full authority of God.
- How does Romans 9:6-9 use this account as an example of sovereign election by God?

Talk it Out. Walk it Out.

- How does this ancient story sadly reflect a lot of current family dynamics where one man has children with two women and sends the illegitimate son away with a single mother and no support?
- When Abraham sent Isaac and Ishmael away into the desert with only minimal food and water do you believe he was acting in faith or cruelty?
- Looking at everyone in the story – who do you most identify with and why (Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar, Ishmael)?
- What do you learn about God from this story, particularly His kindness to everyone involved?

NOTES

IN THE BEGINNING

What Does Faith Look Like as a Parent?

Scripture to Read: Genesis 21:22-22:19

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

Genesis 22:1-2 – “Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.’”

Commentary:

Genesis 21 ends with the serene portrait that Abraham’s life has finally all come together under God’s perfect blessing. Despite nearly losing his wife twice, Abraham still has Sarah. Despite waiting for 25 years, Abraham finally has Isaac. After residing near the Philistine king Abimelech for some time, the land he had been using at the kindness of the king was given to him complete with a well to provide fresh water for his large household. The serene scene ends with Abraham planting a tree as a sign of rest, as it appears the drama and uncertainty of his life has come to an end as he settles down to enjoy his days with his son and wife.

However, Genesis 22 is then a brilliant literary contrast to the portrait at the end of Genesis 21. Sometime later, when Isaac was likely a young man, Moses tells us that God tested Abraham. This statement clues us in that God intends not to lead Abraham into sin, but rather prove Abraham’s faith as our old English word for test means. Perhaps the point of this test was not for God to see if Abraham had faith, but rather for Abraham to demonstrate the depth of his faith in front of his son Isaac so that he too would learn to walk in faith as his father had.

Echoing God’s initial call to Abraham in Genesis 12, God commanded Abraham to “go” and sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering. This would have required that Abraham slaughter his son, dismember him, and burn his body. Such a taking of a child’s life

was directly forbidden later by God.^a Obediently, Abraham awoke early the next morning without any noticeable hesitation and set out on the roughly 50-mile trek with his son to do as the Lord commanded.

Just before he murdered his son with the knife in the air above him, the angel of the Lord (again likely Jesus Christ pre-incarnate) called to Abraham from Heaven commanding him not to harm his son. God then provided a ram to be sacrificed. The angel of the Lord again spoke from Heaven reiterating God's covenant promises to give Abraham blessing, descendants, land, and blessing to all nations of the earth. Of course, these promises would later be fulfilled when the Father would have His long-awaited, only beloved Son put to death in our place for our sins.

The comparisons between this account and the death of Jesus are many. Here are some examples through which we see that Isaac is a type of Jesus Christ pointing toward the future fulfillment of what is prophesied in this scene:

Jesus is the Greater Isaac (Genesis 22)

1. Isaac and Jesus were both born in accordance with promises given many years before
2. Isaac and Jesus were both born at God's appointed time after years of waiting
3. Isaac and Jesus were both born of miracles
4. Isaac and Jesus were both firstborn sons
5. Isaac and Jesus were both loved by their fathers
6. Isaac and Jesus both left their father's home (Beersheba/ Heaven)
7. Isaac and Jesus both journeyed three days (Beersheba/ Moriah, cross/empty tomb)
8. Isaac and Jesus were both escorted by two men to their sacrifice (2 servants, 2 thieves)
9. Isaac and Jesus were both young men who carried wood

^a Leviticus 18:21, 20:2

- upon their back to their sacrifice
10. Isaac and Jesus both willingly submitted their lives to their father
 11. Isaac and Jesus were both laid down as an offering for sin
 12. Isaac and Jesus both asked their father a question: "Where is the lamb?", "Why have you forsaken me?"
 13. Jesus is the Angel of the Lord who spared Isaac and died as the sacrifice for sin
 14. Isaac was promised that God would provide, and Jesus was that provision
 15. Isaac was raised from death figuratively, and Jesus was raised from death literally
 16. Isaac & Jesus went forth to get their bride (Rebekah, Church)

According to Hebrews 11:17-19, Abraham's faith was so great that, "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.'" Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

After having walked with God for many years and seeing God provide in very difficult situations, Abraham had apparently learned to trust God no matter what. And his faith in God was so resolute that he believed that even if he killed his son, God, who gave him the son through a miracle, could give him back through yet another miracle. After all, Abraham had also lost his wife on two occasions only to see God bring her back to him and Abraham believed that God would do the same with Isaac.

Perhaps God brought this test not to discover what was in Abraham's heart, as God would have already known that. God may have waited for this test until his son Isaac was a young man so that Isaac could see that Abraham loved God more than even his own son whom he dearly loved and trusted God with that which was most dear to him. Also, Isaac could see this event, experience the

depth of his father's faith, and learn to love and trust God as his father did.

Dig Deeper:

- What does Scripture later say about child sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2; 2 Kings 3:27; Jeremiah 19:5)?
- Read 2 Chronicles 3:1 and see where the Temple was later built to prepare people for the coming of Jesus as the Son of God sacrificed for sin.
- Although he has stumbled in faith and quick obedience at times, the now older, more mature Abraham responds immediately to this daunting task. How are he and his son illustrating James 2:21-22?
- How do John 3:16 and Romans 8:32 echo this story?

Talk it Out. Walk it Out.

- In naming this place Yahweh Yir'eh which means "the Lord will provide", what is Moses telling us to prepare us for the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?
- Carefully read aloud Genesis 22:16-18 as they are the last words God speaks to Abraham. Why are these words so critical for Abraham to hear and believe?
- For those who are parents, could you imagine having the depth of faith that Abraham did, the willingness to sacrifice your only son you had waited 25 years for? What comes to mind as you emotionally consider being in the place of Abraham or Isaac?

NOTES

Why is the Last Day of Your Marriage the Most Important?

Scripture to Read: Genesis 22:20-23:20

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

Genesis 23:1-2 – “Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. She died...in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.”

Commentary:

In the opening pages of Genesis, we met the first couple, Adam and Eve, who brought the curse. In Genesis 12, we met Abraham and Sarah, to and through whom God promised covenant. From Genesis 12 up until the death of Sarah in Genesis 23, Abraham and Sarah have been the focus of Genesis. Their significance in history and Scripture can hardly be overstated as Genesis covers roughly 2,000 years of history in 50 chapters, and this couple’s life and marriage takes centerstage for 20% of the book. Throughout Scripture, Abraham is named hundreds of times, and Sarah dozens of times as their impact echoes throughout human history.

The death of Sarah, leaving Abraham a widow, is a moving scene. They started marriage as unbelievers, God saved them when they were old, and they move to a new nation to reset their entire life and legacy. Their marriage was far from perfect as it included an adulterous polygamy that was her idea, birth of two sons to two women which causes great strife in the family and hostility between the Jews and Arabs who descend from these sons to this very day, Abraham giving his wife away twice only to have God bring her back, and lots of other faults, flaws, and failures. They are not a perfect marriage by any means, but they are believers in God who are blessed by God. In their story, we see the reality of our humanity on full display, and the hope that God can get us through to the last day of our marriage, which is the most important day. The first day of our marriage is important, but a great wedding day is not the goal as much as a great final day still in love worshipping God together.

There are a few unique things to note in this section of Genesis:

- Sarah is the only woman in the Bible whose age, death, and burial are mentioned, which is a great honor to her
- This is the first official funeral in the Bible
- Abraham's tears at the loss of his wife are the first recording of someone crying in the Bible
- She died in faith without seeing the promises God gave them fulfilled: 1) Her son Isaac is 37 and would not marry until three years after her passing 2) She did not receive the Promised Land, but was buried there after her death, as Abraham likely wanted to one day resurrect in the place God called them to

At the end of Genesis 22, we discover that Abraham's brother Nahor (see also 11:26) had a total of 12 sons. Later, they would become the 12 Aramean tribes just as through Abraham's grandson Jacob would come 12 Hebrew tribes. Moses includes this brief note on Nahor's family to set the stage for Rebekah's marriage to Isaac as she will be from the line of Milcah listed in 22:23-24.

Genesis 23 opens with the death of Sarah at the age of 127. To properly bury his wife, Abraham purchased a sizeable piece of land with a large cave for her burial site. In a pretentious show of kindness, Ephron charged Abraham an exorbitant fee, which Abraham paid likely because he did not want to haggle over details while dealing with the loss of his wife. To compare and contrast, Abraham paid 400 shekels for the land, when the site of the Temple years later would only cost 50 shekels.^a

Ephron had offered to give Abraham the land for free, though the genuineness of his offer is suspect. Nonetheless, Abraham rejected the gift as he had the previous gifts from Melchizedek in Genesis 14 in faith that God would provide for him apart from obligating him to other men. The lesson here is clear – it is fine to receive a gift if it is truly grace without strings attached. Otherwise, reject such offers.

This site became the eventual burial site for Sarah and

^a 2 Samuel 24:24

Abraham, Isaac and Rebekah, and Leah and Jacob.^a Today, it is believed that this cave is beneath the Mosque of Abraham, which is a Muslim shrine in Hebron.

With the sparing of Isaac's life and the death of Sarah, Genesis now begins to shift its focus to Isaac and his son Jacob as the generational family study of Genesis moves from one generation to the next.

Dig Deeper:

- In Genesis 23, Abraham refers to himself as a wanderer living in tents. What light does Hebrews 11:9-16 shed on the home he was ultimately longing for?
- What have you learned through watching the life of Sarah in the pages of Genesis?
- According to Isaiah 51:1-2, how are we as God's people related to Abraham and Sarah?
- Sarah found herself in some terrible circumstances because of her husband's leadership. What light does I Peter 3:1-6 shed on her godliness?

Talk it Out. Walk it Out.

- Looking back, what are the highlights and lowlights in the marriage of Abraham and Sarah?
- Which marriages have you seen that ended well on the last day as an encouragement and example?
- If God had not pursued, saved, spoken to, repeatedly delivered, and blessed Abraham and Sarah, what would their marriage have looked like in the end?

^a Genesis 49:30-32; 50:13

NOTES

IN THE BEGINNING

Why is Your Spouse the Second Most Important Decision of Your Life?

Scripture to Read: Genesis 24:1-67

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

Genesis 24:67 – “Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.”

Commentary:

In Matthew 22:32, the Lord Jesus says, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob...” What Jesus meant was that He is the same God who saved and led each generation of this family. In Genesis 24, we see the focus shift from Abraham and Sarah, following her death, to the marriage of Isaac and the next generation of God’s people. Importantly, Genesis 24 tells us that Abraham was old and had been blessed by God in every way as God had promised, which sets the stage for the blessing and favor of God to continue for generations as an encouragement to their family and all believing families.

Having fathered a child with a woman who worshipped another god and experiencing the lifelong pain of that sin, Abraham is determined that his son marry a godly woman. In an effort to ensure that his son Isaac would marry a woman who would worship his God, Abraham sent his servant back to his home to find a wife for his son. Abraham did this trusting that the God who had blessed him in every way would be faithful to now provide a godly wife for Isaac by sending an angel ahead to arrange the details.

Abraham’s faithful servant did as he was told and went to the region of Abraham’s brother Nahor. Stopping at a spring, the servant prayed for God to provide. Before he had finished his prayer, God had already answered it, sending the lovely virgin Rebekah to the spring. Rebekah drew water for Nahor and his animals and was clearly a very sweet and kind woman. When

the servant inquired of her family, she said her father was Nahor and that he was welcome to stay at their home. The servant was so overjoyed at God's perfect provision that he bowed down and worshiped the Lord for answering his prayer.

Upon returning home to her mother, we are then introduced to the shady and scandalous character Laban, who was Rebekah's brother. Nonetheless, Rebekah agreed to go with Abraham's servant to be Isaac's wife. Upon arriving at Abraham's household, Rebekah was brought into the former tent of Isaac's mother Sarah and they got married. The account of Isaac and Rebekah's marriage ends with the beautiful words that "he loved her" and she was such a delightful woman that he was comforted by her love after the death of his mother. Subsequently, Isaac is now positioned to take the place of Abraham and Rebekah is positioned to take the place of Sarah in the family and their family ministry.

Lastly, we learn a great deal about God in this section, not through His speaking, as He remains silent throughout the story. Rather, it is God's unseen hand of providence that moves the story along, showing that God is faithful to Abraham and Isaac, and that God answers prayer and can be trusted to provide even when He has not spoken but has been spoken to in prayer.

Dig Deeper:

- How is Genesis 24 an illustration of the principles in Ephesians 6:1-4?
- Look up the following Scriptures to see what God has to say about a believer only marrying another believer (Deut. 7:3-4; 1 Kings 11:4; Ezra 9; 1 Cor. 7:39).
- In one of the great love stories of the Bible we read that Isaac loved Rebekah. What other Scriptures come to mind about what love is?

Talk it Out. Walk it Out.

- What do we learn about the effectiveness of sincere prayer from the account of Abraham's servant?
- What do we learn about being a godly and reliable servant

from the example of Abraham's servant?

- What do we learn about the importance of fathers ensuring that their children marry well from the story?
- What do we learn about the ability of God to provide a godly spouse from the story?

NOTES

IN THE BEGINNING

How Does God Work Through Generations of a Family?

Scripture to Read: Genesis 25:1-34

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

Genesis 25:21,24 – “Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant...When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb.”

Commentary:

In our day of blended families, we can easily forget that, in the Old Testament, the family dynamics were even more complicated. As if Abraham’s life had not been complicated enough by fathering sons with multiple women, in Genesis 25, there is another shocking plot twist in his life.

With Sarah now dead, and Isaac married to his lovely bride Rebekah, the stage is set for Abraham’s life to come to an end. Before he does, Abraham surprisingly takes another wife (or possibly had taken this wife some years earlier) and apparently, apart from any miracle, the very old man fathered six more sons before dying at the ripe old age of 175. Abraham left everything to his son Isaac, and his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried their father in the land he had purchased for the burial of Sarah.

Then, we are told of the account of Ishmael’s sons to show that God blessed him as promised, even though he was not the son of the promise or the covenant. The inclusion of some Arab names among the descendants of Ishmael further indicates that he is the father of the Arabs. We then learn that Ishmael died at the age of 137 and his descendants lived in hostility with Isaac’s, a family feud that continues to this day between racial Jews and Arabs.

Despite Abraham’s faults, flaws, and failures, God proves faithful. God had made a series of promises to Abraham that are fulfilled by the end of his life:

- God promised to bless him (12:2)
- God promised the Promised Land he was buried in (12:7) with

Sarah (23:19)

- God promised a son through Sarah (15:4)
- God promised that Abraham would live to a good old age (15:15)
- God promised Abraham that nations would come from him (17:5, 17:16)
- God promised Abraham that kings would come from him (17:6, 17:16)
- God promised that salvation and faith would continue into future generations (17:7)

With Abraham, his wife Sarah and son Ishmael now all dead, Moses moves the Genesis story forward to focus on the birth of Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau. Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah and, like Isaac's mother, she was unable to conceive a child. Isaac trusted that God could and would give Rebekah a son just as God had given him to his barren mother Sarah. Importantly, Isaac will remain faithful to his wife unlike his father Abraham, so the sin of adultery is not passed on to the next generation. Instead, Isaac prayed in faith for 20 years for the blessing of children and God answered the prayer, giving the couple twin boys when Isaac was sixty years of age. Isaac married Rebekah at the age of 40 and, though he had to wait some 20 years for the birth of his promised son, he did not make the same mistake as his father Abraham and attempt to take matters into his own hands by fathering a child with a woman other than his wife.

Curiously, while the other family lines in Genesis are usually quite large, Isaac only has two sons. But, while the 12 sons of Isaac's half-brother Ishmael are mentioned in only a few verses, Isaac's sons Esau and Jacob receive nearly 12 chapters of attention in Genesis (25:19-37:1) because they relate to the promises of the covenant.

The conflict between the boys began in the womb as they wrestled for preeminence. Curious as to what was occurring in her womb, Rebekah prayed to God for insight, and He told her that the boys would struggle throughout their life as the older would serve

the younger and each boy would grow into a nation in conflict with the other (Esau became the nation of Edom and Jacob became the nation of Israel). This battle between the nation of Israel through Jacob and the nation of Edom through Esau continues throughout the Old Testament and culminates with Herod the Edomite king seeking to kill the young King of Israel, Jesus Christ.^a

The first son born was Esau meaning “hairy”, also called Edom “red”, so he was a red and hairy child perhaps like Elmo on Sesame Street. The second son born was Jacob which means “trickster” as he came out of the womb grasping his brother’s heel. As the boys grew, Esau was the man’s man who hunted, ate wild game, and was favored by his father. Jacob was a momma’s boy who preferred to stay around the house and be doted over by his mother. This sort of favoritism became a damaging sin that Jacob also committed years later as a father himself.^b The warning against parental favoritism between children is a recurring theme in Genesis.

As the firstborn, Esau was entitled to the family birthright which would grant him a double portion of his father’s estate and leave him as the head of the family upon his father’s death, as well as enable him to receive a special blessing from his father. One day, Esau came home hungry and his brother Jacob the trickster got his brother to trade his birthright for a meal. In this account, the younger brother displaced the older as had happened previously in Genesis with Cain and Abel as well as Isaac and Ishmael. At the bottom of Esau’s sin was an indifference about God’s covenant promise to bless the nations through the descendants of Abraham that would ultimately bring forth Jesus Christ, flippantly dismissing God’s covenant for a meal. His act also reminds us that people will sometimes give up everything for a fleeting moment of pleasure.

In this scene, we are starkly reminded that once sin enters human history, it is often most painfully felt in our families. The key is to stay close to the Lord and live in obedience to His will, something Isaac does despite the death of his mother and father, evilness of his brother, barrenness of his wife, and godlessness of

^a Matthew 1:1-2, 2:13 ^b Genesis 37:3

his son. Human history is moving forward, despite human sin, to bring forth from this family Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world.

Dig Deeper:

- Read Malachi 1:2-3 to learn more about this scene in Genesis.
- Read Romans 9-11 to learn more about this section of Genesis.
- What light does Hebrews 12:16-17 shed on Esau despising his birthright?

Talk it Out. Walk it Out.

- How is this story an illustration of Psalm 113:1-9?
- What does this story teach us about God's sovereignty over the womb?
- What does this story teach us about prayer and God's timing in answering prayer?
- What negative lesson do we learn about parents favoring one child over another in this story?

NOTES

Why Do Families Need Men to Lead?

Scripture to Read: Genesis 26:1-35

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation:

Genesis 26:24-25a – “That night the LORD appeared to him [Isaac] and said, ‘I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham.’ Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD.”

Commentary:

Genesis 22:1-6 records the Lord appearing and speaking to Isaac as He had his father, Abraham. Likewise, God promised to be with Isaac, bless him, and give him descendants and land according to the promises of the covenant. God notes that He blesses Isaac because his father Abraham “obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.” Though Moses had not yet born, and the law had not yet been given, he obeyed it by faith as a pattern of someone who had God’s laws written on their heart by the Holy Spirit.^a This is also precisely the same language which Deuteronomy 10:1 uses to explain those people who love God and demonstrate it by obeying the law given at the Sinai covenant through Moses.

The rest of the chapter provides a number of similarities between Abraham and his son Isaac including:

- both men received God’s call and promise
- both lived during a period of famine
- both men dwelt in Gerar
- both men had lovely wives
- both men were cowards in the face of possible harm
- both men lied and said their wife was their sister
- both men were spared the consequences of their sin by God’s mercy

^a e.g. Jeremiah 31:33

- both men were rebuked by more pious Gentiles for their lying schemes
- both men were pursued by Abimelech (Isaac may have actually dealt with Abimelech's son or grandson with the same name) for a covenant
- both men were a blessing to their neighbors
- both men trusted God and lived peacefully with their neighbors

Despite Isaac's unbelief that God would protect him and his wife, God blessed him, nonetheless, making him very wealthy. Despite attempts to destroy the financial blessing from God, God overcomes to prove that, even if His blessing is delayed, it cannot and will not be stopped, which is a great source of encouragement. From the story, it is apparent that Isaac was blessed solely because of God's grace to him, as he was a conniving and undeserving man. Much like his father, Isaac is far from perfect, but God remains true to His covenant promises, nonetheless. The theme of salvation by grace alone is on full display in this chapter as the believer acts immorally, whereas the unbeliever acts morally.

In Genesis 26:25, we then see Isaac build an altar and worship the Lord as his father had done, which shows that he also shares the faith of his father. This act is the first outward, visible demonstration that he is in fact a believer. This scene closes by demonstrating how the unbelieving Abimelech recognizes God's presence with and blessing of Isaac, something that God further proves with the provision of a well that was essential to the survival of his household. Since Isaac accepted the piece of ground without a known well, he may be acting much like his father Abraham did with Lot in Genesis 13, trusting God to give him the right piece of land and even provide him a well, as God did faithfully.

The chapter then concludes with a brief note about Isaac's son, Esau. Like Isaac, Esau married at the age of 40. But, unlike Isaac, he married two godless women rather than one godly woman. Esau's impetuous and foolish decision-making that began with him foregoing his birthright apparently continued and was a "source of

grief to Isaac and Rebekah.” The text leaves us to wonder why Isaac did not devise a wise plan to choose a wife for his son as Isaac’s father Abraham had for him.

Dig Deeper:

- To learn more about the connection between Isaac and Jesus look up the following Scriptures in their contexts: Matthew 1:2, 8:11, 22:32.
- Circle in your Bible the occasions in this chapter which note God blessing Isaac to discover why he prospered. In what ways does this chapter record God’s blessing to Isaac?
- What do we learn about God’s character in this story?
- Carefully consider Genesis 26:25a to better understand what is truly in Isaac’s heart, even though his actions do cause us to wonder if he truly loves God.
- What do we learn about God blessing some people and families to be rich in wealth in this chapter and how does that lesson cut against the false cultural narrative that all wealthy people are basically evil or sinful?

Talk it Out. Walk it Out.

- How is the truthfulness of the truism “like father, like son” demonstrated in this story?
- How is the story of Esau an illustration of the principle in Proverbs 10:1-2?
- What do we learn about the importance of who we marry yet again in this chapter of Genesis? How is Genesis showing us that the two most important decisions we make are 1) who our God is and 2) who our spouse is?
- What does Genesis 26:14-15 reveal about coveting and jealousy that some people have when God blesses others?

NOTES

IN THE BEGINNING

MARK DRISCOLL & REALFAITH

With Pastor Mark, it's all about Jesus! He is a spiritual leader, prolific author, and compelling speaker, but at his core, he is a family man. Mark and his wife Grace have been married and doing vocational ministry together since 1993 and, along with their five kids, planted Trinity Church in Scottsdale, Arizona as a family ministry.

Pastor Mark, Grace, and their oldest daughter, Ashley, also started RealFaith Ministries, which contains a mountain of Bible teaching for men, women, couples, parents, pastors, leaders, Spanish speakers, and more, which you can access by visiting **RealFaith.com** or downloading the **RealFaith app**.

With a master's degree in exegetical theology from Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon, he has spent the better part of his life teaching verse-by-verse through books of the Bible, contextualizing its timeless truths and never shying away from challenging, convicting passages that speak to the heart of current cultural dilemmas.

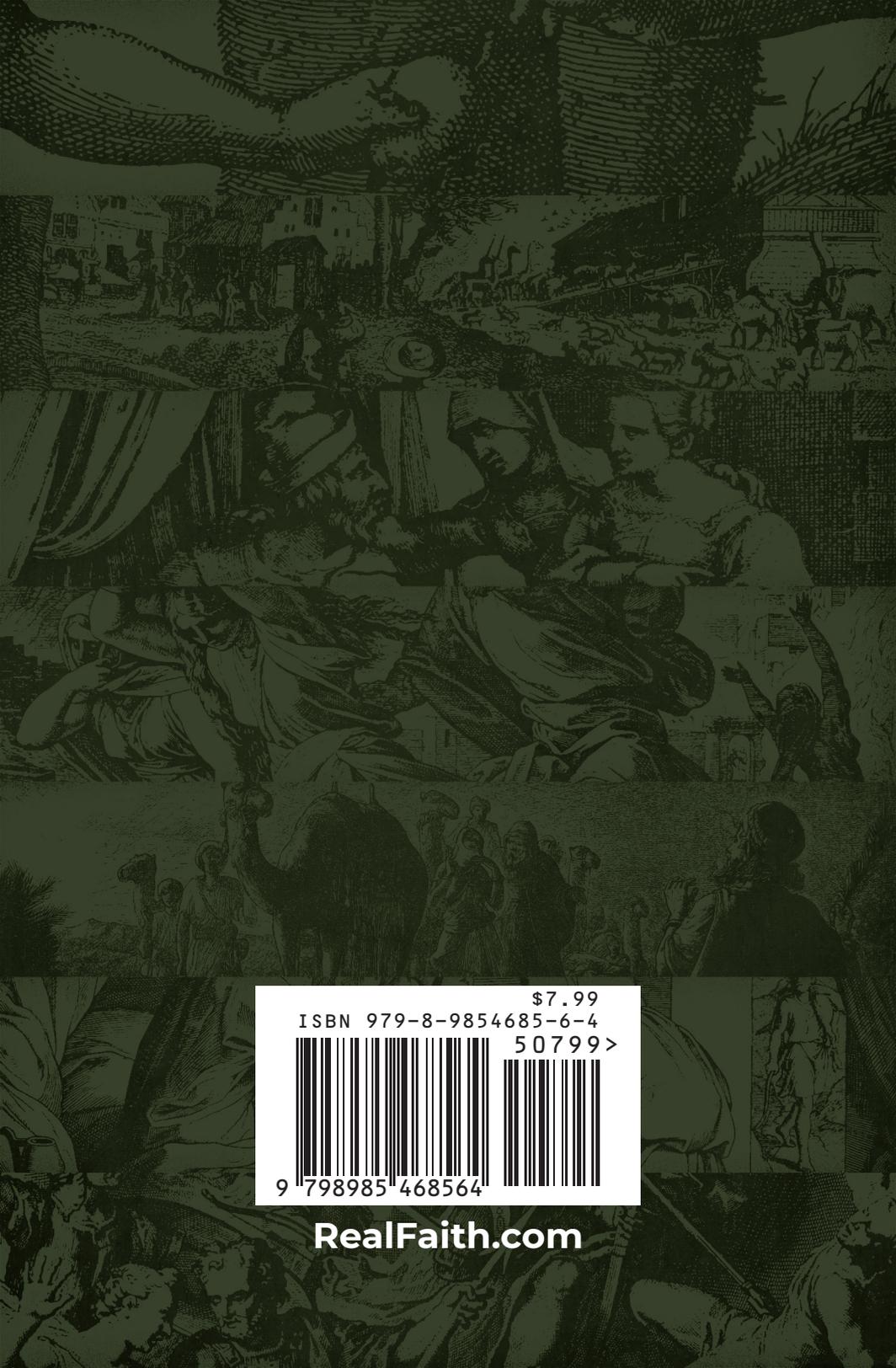


Together, Mark and Grace have co-authored *Win Your War* and *Real Marriage*, and he co-authored a father-daughter project called *Pray Like Jesus* with his daughter, Ashley. Pastor Mark has also written numerous other books including *Spirit-Filled Jesus*, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, *Vintage Jesus*, and *Doctrine*.

If you have any prayer requests for us, questions for future Ask Pastor Mark or Dear Grace videos, or a testimony regarding how God has used this and other resources to help you learn God's Word, we would love to hear from you at **hello@realfaith.com**.

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