

***LB 301: OLD TESTAMENT BOOK ~
THE PENTATEUCH***



Certificate and Diploma Levels

**Teacher Handbook
Nazarene Theological Institute
Africa Region**

LB 301: OLD TESTAMENT BOOK STUDY - THE PENTATEUCH

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**** Important Note ****

Pre-Course Homework

It is vital to emphasize to the students the importance of completing their **pre-course assignments** (as specified in the Student Workbook) **before** the course begins. This allows the students to begin the course with solid background information on the book of Genesis as well as general knowledge concerning all five books of the Pentateuch. Without completion in advance of these assignments, the students will begin the course at a great disadvantage and their learning will be delayed or cut short.

Should some students be unable to complete the pre-course assignments before the course begins, they will need to complete this assignment as soon as possible, but with a grade reduction for lateness. Be sure to remind the students at the beginning of the course that the chapter headings of the outline for Genesis chapters 12-50 must be their own personal work and cannot be copied/borrowed from the Student Workbook, from any other books, or from each other.

Read Teacher Guidelines carefully
BEFORE beginning to teach this course.

TEACHER GUIDELINES

Thank you for choosing to teach this course to others. May God richly bless you and those in your class as you study His Word together.

NOTE: Please understand that although the Student Workbook may at first appear similar to this Teacher Handbook, they are not the same. Considerable more material is found in the Teacher Handbook. Please prepare your teaching approach carefully with this in mind, and mark passages accordingly.

Homework schedules: see Appendix A in the Student Workbook

Monday evening: Epic of Gilgamesh

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday evenings: one Journal entry per evening and begin work on Bible Study

Night before quiz, remind students to study for the quiz - the particular day the quiz is given will depend on the progression of the class

Friday evening: Bible Study completion and study for Final Exam

Note: Please be sure that all students understand they must do their own writing when completing any homework assignment. Although it is acceptable to discuss the assignments in groups, there can be no copying of one student's words into another student's assignments. Any copying must result in an automatic zero score for all students involved.

Epic of Gilgamesh – see Appendix A in the Student Workbook

The purpose of this homework assignment is to give the students greater competence in comparing and contrasting different worldviews. Since most of the students are already working with people who do not have a Christian worldview, it is important to learn how to assess a different view and articulate how it is different. This exercise gives them practice at doing so.

Bible Study – see Appendix A in the Student Workbook

The Bible Study in the Student Workbook is meant to introduce the student to a basic level of biblical evaluation that will result in an adequate modern-day application if followed carefully. A person who reads a biblical text with no understanding of its original meaning, may develop a contemporary application for their congregation or study group that has little to do with the text's original meaning, and therefore could not be God's intended message for His people. Following a simple system like the one presented in this course will encourage proper biblical interpretation and application.

1. Divide the class into three groups and assign one of the passages below to each group. Students can meet in groups to discuss their passage, but they must **do their own independent written study**. Three passages for this assignment are the following:
 - **Crossing the Sea of Reeds:** Exodus 14:13-31

- **Water from the Rock**, (Exodus 17:1-7)
- **Balaam and the Donkey**: Numbers 22:22-35

These three events were chosen so that the students would have more detailed exposure to the books Exodus through Deuteronomy. The Genesis Lectures and Application Questions give the students good exposure to passages in Genesis so that they can well decide an application from most Genesis passages

2. If students have not taken the course on Bible Interpretation, they may not understand how **Contextual Analysis** works. It will be important for the teacher to understand this concept if he/she is going to introduce the students to it. For the above biblical texts, the surrounding context is:
 - **Crossing the Sea of Reeds**
preceding passage: 14:5-12; following passage: 15:1-21
 - **Water from the Rock**
preceding passage: 16:22-35; following passage: 17:8-16
 - **Balaam and the Donkey**
preceding passage: 22:2-21; following passage: 22:36-41
3. The IVP Bible Background Commentary on the Old Testament is used for the Historical-Cultural Analysis section. If this book is unavailable, then the instructor should make copies of the appropriate pages from that book in advance, to take to the class. The least desirable option is to eliminate this section of the Bible Study. It is very difficult to do an adequate college-level Bible Study without reference books. The Bible Study presented in the Student Workbook is very basic, but it will produce an acceptable result if followed carefully.
4. Be sure to emphasize that any outside source **must be referenced**. a shortened reference such as (Walton 127) may be used for this Bible Study, but the students must understand that **referencing is mandatory** at this level of education. 10% will be deducted from the grade if a student forgets to reference the source.
5. The Literary Analysis calls for an outline of the passage and a description of its genre. Again, if the teacher is not familiar with how to determine an outline or genre, additional work will be necessary so that he/she can adequately explain these concepts to the students.
6. It is recommended that the teacher choose a fourth passage and do the Bible Study on that passage, in order to demonstrate each aspect of the Bible Study to the students before they are asked to complete their own study - this will provide an example for them to follow.
7. Remind the students that the Application for contemporary audiences should not be written until the first five parts of the Bible Study are completed. Understanding the original meaning of the passage is needed first, before application for today can be correctly determined.

Genesis Application Questions

Your Teacher lecture notes will indicate where the Application Questions (found in Appendix C of the Student Workbook) can be effectively used. However, it is unlikely that an intensive NTI course will have time to discuss these questions. A longer teaching series for a church or Bible Study may be able to use these questions for their discussions. Point the questions out to the students so that they are aware that the questions can also be used to develop sermon and preaching ideas.

Journaling

These Journal prompts came from the Application Questions discussed above

- You may choose other prompts from these Application Questions if desired:

- **Application Questions on the Flood** #3,4,5
- **Application Questions on Chapters 20-25** #3
- **Application Questions for Chapters 41-50** #3,4 (emphasis here is to be on the student's personal application to his/her own life, not on answering the questions about Joseph and Judah accurately)

Timelines

A timeline of the major events of Genesis through Deuteronomy can be placed on the wall for the students to study. As you study each of the events (below), write it on a paper and tape it on the wall, adding to the timeline along the wall, as you study each event. Here are the events to be placed on the timeline in sequence as they are studied:

Genesis:

1. Creation
2. Adam and Eve in Eden (Fall)
3. Cain kills Abel
4. Seth born
5. Noah and Flood
6. Table of Nations
7. Tower of Babel
8. Abram called by God
9. Ishmael is born
10. Sodom and Gomorrah
11. Isaac is born
12. Testing of Abraham (Isaac's offering)
13. Isaac marries Rebekah
14. Esau and Jacob are born
15. Jacob takes birthright and blessing
16. Jacob left Promised Land for Haran
17. Jacob marries Leah & Rachel
18. 11 sons
19. Returns to P.L. as "Israel"
20. 12th son
21. Joseph dreams

22. Sold as slave to Egypt
23. Imprisoned falsely
24. Interprets Pharaoh's dreams
25. Becomes ruler of Egypt
26. Reconciles and brings family to Egypt

Exodus:

27. Egyptian slavery
28. 10 plagues
29. Exodus from Egypt
30. Covenant and 10 commandments at Mt. Sinai
31. Golden Calf

Leviticus:

32. Consecration of the Priesthood

Numbers:

33. 12 spies & Rebellion
34. Wilderness Wanderings

Deuteronomy:

35. Preparation to enter Promised Land (3 sermons)

These events will need to be memorized in their sequence, because they are the ones that will appear on both the quiz and final exam ordering sequences (see below). Also, they are the events that will appear on the Final Exam book location section wherein the students must designate in which book (Exodus through Deuteronomy) certain events are located.

Quiz and Final Exam

Timing

The Quiz can be given when you have finished discussing through Jacob and Esau's birthright (Genesis ch. 25). Remind the students to study for the quiz.

Ordering Sequences

For some students it is difficult to understand the concept of placing numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, etc. to state which event came first, second, third, etc. in a list of events. Others have no problem with the concept of placing events in a chronological order. Always give the students an example before the testing time so that they can determine for themselves if they understand how to order a series of events. Such an example is the following:

List the order of these events according to which happened first/earliest (1) through which happened most recent/latest (8):

- _____ Noah builds the ark for the flood
- _____ God confuses the languages of the people of Babel
- _____ Adam and Eve listen to the serpent and disobey God
- _____ God calls Abram to go to the Promised Land
- _____ Cain kills Abel
- _____ The People of Babel decide to build a high tower
- _____ God creates the heavens and the earth
- _____ Seth is born to Adam and Eve

Certificate Level: A simple option for the students who have difficulty with ordering is to place the same events listed on the quiz or exam onto separate cards (one event per card), mix up the order of the cards, then have each student who desires to try this approach to place the cards in their correct sequence during the test time. It does not matter how the students achieve the result (whether with 1, 2, 3 numbering or with card sequencing) as long as they are able to prove their competency in placing a series of events in the correct chronological order.

Further Recommendations

All teachers should have a whiteboard or chalkboard for teaching this course. Placing important concepts on the board will help students recognize and retain them in their memories as well as to mark them in their Student Workbooks as important points to study. This is especially true for concepts that will appear on the Quiz and Final Exam.

It will be helpful if you will mark all Quiz/Final Exam concepts in your Teacher Workbook, so that when you reach those points in your teaching, you can remind the students of their importance. They must still do the studying themselves, of course, but at least they will have a general understanding of what areas are important to study.

The course has been structured so that more time will be spent on the early chapters of Genesis than on later chapters, while Exodus through Deuteronomy will only consist of overview information. Please take time with the students as you work through the first several chapters of Genesis to see how well students understand this material. Many of the foundational beliefs of Christianity come from these first chapters. Our hope is that all students finishing this course will understand these truths well, but that will only be the case if they are allowed to learn the material through discussion and application, as well as class lectures. Look for opportunities to hold group discussions and applications of the stories to present-day situations. There are many applications possible throughout the time of the course.

Lecture Notes Bibliography

Material referenced in lectures are located in the following sources:

- Arnold, Bill T. Encountering the Book of Genesis. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998.
- Briscoe, D. Stuart. The Communicator's Commentary, Volume 1: Genesis. Waco: Word Books, 1987.
- Brueggemann, Walter. Interpretation Bible Commentary: Genesis. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973.
- Dunning, H. Ray. Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1988.
- Gire, Ken, ed. Between Heaven and Earth: Prayers and Reflections that Celebrate an Intimate God. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.
- Glasser, Kingdom and Mission. Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1989.
- Hill, Andrew, and John Walton. A Survey of the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991.
- LaSor, William S, David A. Hubbard, and Frederic W. Bush. Old Testament Survey. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996.
- Matthews, Victor & Don Benjamin. Old Testament Parallels. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.
- Wenham, Gordon J. Word Biblical Commentary Volume 1: Genesis 1-15. Dallas: Word Books, 1987.
- Wenham, Gordon J. Word Biblical Commentary Volume 2: Genesis 16-50. Dallas: Word Books, 1994.

Please note the periodic boxes drawn around paragraphs of information. These boxes provide additional or background information for the teacher that will not necessarily need to be taught to the students.

Sentences in italics are instructions and suggestions for the teacher.

Nazarene Theological Institute
Church of the Nazarene
Africa Region

Syllabus

LB 301: Old Testament Book Study – The Pentateuch

Course Author

Rev. Mary Spaulding, Ph.D.

Note to student: If you discover any typing or factual errors in this *Student Workbook*, please inform your teacher

Course description

This course is offered as an in-depth study of an Old Testament book or related Old Testament books with the purpose of understanding the content and genre as well as developing the skills required to interpret this portion of scripture through teaching and preaching. LB 301 will provide a general overview of the Pentateuch while devoting greatest emphasis to the book of Genesis.

Program outcomes

The following program outcomes assigned to this course are identifiable competencies required of the student in this course.

- CN 1 Knowledge of the history and content of the Old Testament
- CN 3 Use of the principles of Biblical interpretation
- CN 4 Appreciation of the theological foundations of the Christian faith from the Biblical point-of-view when read from a Wesleyan perspective

- CP 2 Ability to preach Biblical sermons that can then be applied to life
- CP 4 Ability to teach the Word of God and make disciples that can make other disciples.
- CP 10 Ability to interpret and apply the Bible according to the best principles of Biblical interpretation

- CR 1 Ability to give value to Christian morality and how to apply this ethic to life
- CR 3 Ability to worship God by using personal and public means of grace
- CR 4 Ability to allow Christ's character to form the attitudes and actions of one's daily life
- CR 6 Ability to give value to relationships through openness, righteousness, and honesty
- CR 9 Ability to engage in continuing formation and education

- CX 2 Ability to understand the context within which he or she lives with objectivity
- CX 4 Ability to understand the differences between the worldviews of the Western world, that of Africa, and that of the Bible

Course outcomes

For achieving the competencies above, this course organizes several learning activities & requirements around the following intended learning outcomes. At the end of the course, the student will be able to:

- 1) To identify the key people and events in chronological order in the book(s) and their roles in the context of their times (CN 1, CN 3, CP 2, CP 4)
- 2) To identify the main themes of the book(s) (CN 1, CN 3, CN 4, CP 4)
- 3) To identify and articulate understanding of the key theological concepts addressed in the book(s) and how they relate to today (CN 3, CN 4, CP 4, CP 10)
- 4) To identify and articulate the general flow of the books' message (CN 1, CN 3)
- 5) To recognize different literary genres and the necessity to read and understand a text according to its genre (CN 3, CN 4, CP 10)
- 6) To identify references or allusions of Old Testament passages, people, events, or messages in the New Testament (CN 1, CP 4)
- 7) To give students opportunity to construct a Bible Study or Sunday School lesson on one of the primary themes of the book(s) (CN 3, CN 4, CP 2, CP 4, CP 10, CR 9)
- 8) To explain the intended purpose and message of the passage in the cultural and historical context in which it was written and how it translates into a message for today (CN 1, CN 3, CN 4)
- 9) To articulate how the key messages of the book(s) relate to today (CN 3, CP 2, CP 4, CX 2)
- 10) To identify passages speaking to grace, redemption and holiness (CN 4; CP 10, CR 4, CR 6)
- 11) To deepen one's commitment to the Lord as a disciple by studying the personalities of this Old Testament book and in following the guidance of the Holy Scriptures as believers in God and His word for us (CP 4, CR 1, CR 4, CR 6, CR 9, CX 4)
- 12) To use the reading of God's Word to improve one's spiritual growth during worship services and personal devotions (CN 3, CR 3, CR 4, CR 9, CX 2)

This course offers the following percentages of the four Cs:

Content	40%
Competence	25%
Character	20%
Context	15%

Course recommended reading and resources

The Bible. The student will not have a principal text apart from a study Bible.

They will be expected to understand the introduction to each book.

Beacon Bible Commentary, or other available commentaries suggested by the professor or Institute.

Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.

Course requirements/assignments

This course has been designed for Diploma Level students who are able to read and write in English. Certificate Level students who cannot read or write well will need to be paired with a Diploma Level student who can verify completion of each assignment, and quiz and final exam will be taken orally.

A. Regular class attendance, attention, and participation are especially important. Students are responsible for all assignments and in-class work. Much work in this course is group work. Cooperative, small-group work cannot be made up. That makes attendance imperative. Even if one does extra reading or writing, the values of discussion, dialogue, and learning from each other are hindered if students fail to attend. If a total of three hours (half a day of class) are missed during the course, the instructor will require extra work before completion can be acknowledged. If six hours or more of this class are missed, the student will be given a failing grade and will be required to repeat the whole course.

B. Pre-Course Assignments

1. Pre-Course Assignment #1. Each student shall prepare an outline of Genesis chapters 12-50 by using the following *Inductive Study* method. This outline will be submitted **at the beginning of the first day of class** for grading. Grade points will be taken off for late assignments not turned in on time.

Step 1

Read through the entire book of Genesis without stopping to analyze or take notes. The purpose is to get an overview of the book. Look for the major events and people involved in the book. Notice the difference of topics/themes between chapters 1-11 & chapters 12-50.

Step 2

Read through the entire book of Genesis again. During this second reading, read chapters 12-50 more carefully. Write down observations as you read, asking yourself these questions – Who? When? Where? What? Why? How? The major purpose of this reading is to create a **short title** for each chapter that shows what each chapter is about. These titles will help you paint a picture of the general flow of the

book's message throughout this section. Do **NOT** use titles already written in your Bible but determine **your own** chapter titles.

Step 3

Review Gen 12-50 again in order to note the major divisions of this book. Develop **3-6 major book division titles** of less than 6 words each. Be sure to indicate which chapters each division title is covering.

Develop **one overall theme or title** for chapters 12-50. This should be related to the major divisions, but as an overview of the book. Again, both the division titles and overall theme should be your own work, not that of some other author or editor.

Step 4

Read/review the book one more time to evaluate your titles, then **construct a chart** of the outline of chapters 12-50 to include the overall theme or title, the major book divisions, and the chapter titles under each major division. This completed outline is **due beginning of the first day of class**. Grade points will be taken off assignments not turned in on time. (course outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11)

- 2. Pre-Course Assignment #2.** In addition to reading all of Genesis, read the chapters listed below in each of the books of the Pentateuch before the first day of class. You will submit a Reading Report (provided by the instructor) on Day 1 of the course stating how much reading you completed prior to that first day. (course outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12)

- **Exodus** chapters 1-3, 12:21-32; chapters 19, 20, and 32
- **Leviticus** 9:7-10:11 (first priestly acts by Aaron and sons); chapters 16 and 23; 25:1-28
- **Numbers** chapters 11-14; 20:1 – 21:9
- **Deuteronomy** chapter 6; 10:12-22; 29:1 – 31:13; chapter 34

C. In-Class Assignments

- 1. Journal** – Journaling is to be done in an exercise book. A spiritual journal is a tool to record your experiences and spiritual insights from God (via His Word and His Spirit), gained from this course, from fellow believers, and from life. Students will need to make at least 3 entries of at least 7-10 lines. The purpose of this assignment is to help the student relate the Scriptures and key Biblical truths to his or her own life. (Course outcomes 9, 11, 12)
- 2. Group Work** – To understand a subject well, one must “talk it”. Therefore you are expected to discuss the material with others in and out of class. The in-class group work is very important. Students will

serve as study partners for group explorations and discussion. Each student will be observed by the teacher and graded accordingly. (Course outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11).

- 3. Class Notes** – The Student Workbook is designed to assist with following lectures and learning activities. Students are expected to write notes on the resource sheets as the teacher lectures. **All notes are to be written in the Student Workbook - NOT in your spiritual journal/ assignment exercise book.** The purpose of this assignment is to help students develop a resource book for future reference & spiritual nurture. (Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,9, 10,11)
- 4. Written Assignments** – There will be two assignments that will require some study in order to prepare the work. For Diploma Level students, these assignments will be written in English, using proper grammar. Assignment detail are in Appendix A of Student Workbook.
- 5. Quiz** – A quiz will be given at the beginning of class on at least one day during the course. (Course outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11)
- 6. Final Exam** – A final exam will be on the last day of class. It will focus on techniques learned, as well as material discussed in class. The exam will include multiple choice, short answers, and essays. The essay questions are designed to show the student’s ability to **apply exegetical principles** to a text. (This exam must be passed in order to pass the course.) (Course outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11)

Late Work – Since this is an intensive course in which each day’s classroom work is dependent upon the completion of previous assignments, any late pre-course or in-class homework will receive a 10% late deduction in grade.

Course Evaluation

Pre-Course Genesis Outline	15%
Pre-Course Reading Completion	10%
Written assignments	25%
Journal	10%
Group Work incl. Class Participation	5%
Class Notes	5%
Quiz	10%
Final Exam	20%

AN OVERVIEW

√ Old Testament (OT)

The Old Testament contains **39** books written over a millennium of time – a thousand years of humans living, breathing, giving birth, dying; a thousand years of wars and conflicts and people groups moving over vast areas of land. It is made up of poetry, history, sermons, short stories, written by various authors in vastly different cultures, yet there is **unity**. That unity is striking – of one God who does not change, of one history of humanity.

It is called **Heilsgeschichte** — the history of **salvation**. The overarching theme is the desire of God to be with us in relationship, and how he goes about accomplishing what seems to be the impossible.

These books were not written as books, but on scrolls, either papyrus or animal skins (called parchment), or occasionally on beaten metal. Each book of the OT made up one scroll – a very long book like Jeremiah might be 20-30 ft in length. Most of them were written in the ancient language of Hebrew, still practiced today in Israel.

Yet we Christians believe that the OT is not enough. It must have the **New Testament** (NT) to fill out what God has accomplished and His plan for all humanity. The OT was a time of preparation; the plan of God could not be fully known or understood without the NT.

But we must come to realize that the NT is **not enough** by itself as well, for we cannot understand God and His world without having the OT to describe it to us. How could we know about the possibility to become whole again for the human race if we had not heard how we were made in God’s image? How would we know why there is evil in the world and in our souls if we did not have the story of Adam and Eve to explain it? How could we understand how much God hates evil but loves us if we didn’t know the history of His chosen people? If we only had the God portrayed by Jesus, meek and mild and seemingly very human, would we be able to understand His magnificent, overpowering, immense, awe-inspiring greatness? Without the OT, we could not understand how much God had to give up in order to become that lowly, weak human being. We also could not understand **WHY** God did what He did in and through Jesus Christ.

Why study the Old Testament?

- 1) To understand the NT, Jesus, God, creation, humans
- 2) To understand world history in general and how/why civilization acts the way that it does. Our contemporary history is an extension of the history of the world displayed in the OT
- 3) To understand the history of salvation in particular.
What we can notice through all salvation history is the movement of God's choosing. **Place diagram on board:** First Adam and Eve, then their offspring, becoming a large group of people, the failure of humanity and so the flood, back down to Noah and his family, broadening out again to all the peoples of the earth. Failure again! Back down to one man Abraham and his wife Sarah, broadening out again to his family, his clan, the formation of the 12 tribes, and the birth of an entire nation. But when the time had been fulfilled, it is brought back down to one girl having one baby boy. This time the broadening out will include all humanity in its **heilsgeschichte** – salvation history, no longer limited to one particular nation of people. And this time there will not be failure. Our study will consist of this first section, as far as the formation of the 12 tribes in Genesis and the forming of a people of God through Deuteronomy.
- 4) To correct any wrong impressions we may have. We so often want to think on the kindness of God, but not on His sternness, His aversion of all things evil, His desire for purity and holiness, His longsuffering patience with humanity. The OT will help remove our self-imposed blinders. It shows us a God who moves slowly, unpredictably, paradoxically. The Jews never tried to explain away the tensions of their sacred writings.
- 5) To acquire this history for ourselves. This is OUR history. Through Jesus Christ these become our ancestors just as truly as if we were physically born into the Jewish race. (Rom 9:6-8 and 11:17-18) You and I have the oldest genealogy in the world as a result!

Old Testament Structure ~ how it fits together

The Old Testament is the sacred scripture for the Jewish people (called Israelites or Hebrews in early history). It is best not to use the term "Old Testament" when speaking with a religious Jew. Jews do not recognize a new testament, so they do not appreciate our reference to their sacred scriptures as an old testament. Their canon is therefore different than our canon (canon meaning "measuring reed" and referring to the writings that are accepted as authoritative by a particular religious group, and recognized as divine revelation, inspired by God). The Jews commonly refer to the entirety of their sacred scriptures (OT) as the Hebrew Scriptures. They include 3 sections:

- Law or Pentateuch
- Prophets
- Writings

The Law is considered the most important and sacred of these three categories. Often the Jews will just refer to the Law (Hebrew word: Torah) when they are referring to all their sacred writings, including all three sections. Other times they are referring only to the first five books. That is why this course is named Pentateuch rather than Torah, since it is then clear that we are studying only the first five books of the OT.

The word Pentateuch comes from the Greek pentateuchos which means five-volume book. The entire Pentateuch is based upon a two-fold structure, which comes from Genesis:

- Gen 1-11: the primeval history of humanity, a universal focus
- Gen 12-Deut 34: particular history and instruction of a chosen people.

These 2 sections are related to each other as question and answer, problem and solution, and the clue is in Gen. 12:3:

"I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Do you see how the rest of the Bible and of all of human history reveals how God carried out this promise of blessing? God has answered the question of all of humanity in its sinfulness and inability to obey God, by his election of one people whom he will form and prepare for the coming of his son.

√ The Pentateuch

Author

Ask the students: Who Wrote the Pentateuch? Someone will probably answer "Moses".

That is the common assumption. Yet there is no place in the Pentateuch where it says Moses is the author of it all. We only have clues, don't we? What we know is:

1. It is actually an anonymous work. **Moses** is not specified as its author nor is anyone else. It is tradition and later writings that lead us to believe he was the author. In the NT it calls the Pentateuch the law or book of Moses or simply Moses, with Lk 16:29 referring to the whole of the OT as "Moses and the prophets."
2. Moses is given credit for certain specific writings. The Pentateuch does indicate literary activity by its principal figure. He is described as ordered

to write, or as actually writing historical facts (Ex 17:14; Num 33:2), laws or sections of law codes (Ex 24:4; 34:27f) and one poem (Dt 31:22).

3. It is probable that Moses wrote parts of it. We have no reason to deny Moses' role in the production of the Pentateuch. But he probably did not write it all out in its final form, which we now have before us. Why not?
4. He definitely did not write all of it. There are added references that could not have come from Moses but must have come from someone after Moses' death, including historical anachronisms such as the designation of the homeland of Abraham as Ur "of the Chaldeans" (11:28,31) when the Chaldeans do not appear until 1st millennium BC, naming the city of Dan in 14:14 even though that city was known as Laish until the time of Judges, mention of the Israelite kings in Gen 36:31 or the Philistines in Gen 21:34, reference to Egypt as the "district of Rameses," Gen 47:11. These are all **editorial insertions clearly designed to update a later audience**, and of course the reference to Moses' own death, which had to have come from another's hand.
5. One probable scenario: Today, most conservative scholars acknowledge Moses as the compiler of existing oral and/or written sources into what we now know as Genesis and the author of parts of the other four books.
6. Though others contributed to the Pentateuch, this does not have to affect its claim to be divinely inspired. Does that mean it is less than scriptural, that somehow it cannot be divinely inspired? We do not believe so at all. Our faith says that whatever the process of development, it was all superintended by the same Spirit of God that prompted Moses to act and write in the first place.

Before Moses: How this process took place we cannot be sure, but probably the narratives of the patriarchs were preserved, primarily by oral means, during the period of slavery in Egypt. Remember, these early cultures were adept at passing down verbal stories in great detail – their minds were trained to remember lengthy amounts of information. They were first written down probably before or during the time of Moses (certainly possibly by himself) because recent studies have shown that Hebrew as a written language was being developed during that time. Moses may have been acting more as editor than as author.

After Moses: Editing and compilation of oral and written material continued on the books by later generations. It probably did not come to be considered canon for Jews until after the return from Babylonian exile. Yet the strong Mosaic character of all five cannot be denied. He was indeed instrumental in their formation.

Major Themes

How would you name each of the 5 books according to their themes?

- Genesis: The Beginnings of Life and Promises to the Fathers
- Exodus: Guidance out of Egypt
- Leviticus: Sinai Revelation
- Numbers: Guidance in the Wilderness
- Deuteronomy: Guidance into the Promised Land

Literature of the Pentateuch and Genesis

A "genre" is a **type** of literature. The Pentateuch consists of several different kinds of genres.

Narrative, mostly a third person account of early Israelite history, is mixed together with prayers, speeches, dialogues, and other types of direct discourse. Narrative is the **story-telling** part of the Bible, recounting people and events. These stories blend historical reporting and theological interpretation, so biblical narrative has a purpose. Its purpose is to reveal God's redemptive actions in human history.

Ancient poetry is shown in some of the earliest examples of Hebrew poetry. In Genesis, poetry includes blessings on family members by patriarchs (Rebekah in Gen 24:60; Jacob 49), prophetic utterances (to Rebekah on her 2 sons 25:23), covenant promises (12:1-3; 15:1) and even taunt songs (Lamech in 4:23). Note that Hebrew poetry does not rhyme. We will look at that more later.

Prophetic revelation can occur in prose (example: Gen 15:12-16) or poetic forms (example: Gen 49:8-12). It is God's word coming to His people through a human spokesperson. It may consist of present admonitions or future predictions; both types are found in the Pentateuch.

Law is another genre found **only** in the Pentateuch but we will not discuss this genre until Exodus, where it first appears.

√ Genesis

Genesis is the book of **beginnings**. The name Genesis comes from the Greek translation of the OT. "Genesis" means "source, origin, the coming into being of something". The Hebrew name comes from the book's first word, as do other Hebrew names of some of the other OT books. This Hebrew word means "in the beginning." Both names are appropriate, since it is the source and origin of our understanding of God, ourselves, and our faith, and it is the beginning of Heilsgeschichte, **holy history**.

The entire book is structured around 11 genealogy formulas (Hebrew word: toletoth), which we will point out as we move through the text. They are used to link each story with the next and explain the relationships involved. This is the bloodline of the people of God. The question could be discussed at this time: How important is bloodline in African culture?

Genesis Structure

There are two parts to the book of Genesis: Primeval history and patriarchal history.

PRIMEVAL PERIOD: Gen 1-11

Historical background

There is no accurate way to date the primeval period depicted in Gen 1-11 since it is truly pre-history, before history was being recorded and dated. Hence precise time periods are impossible to determine.

Theology

The primary purpose of this material is theological.

- 1) God is Creator. We will discuss this in more detail as we review ch 1. Only God creates, and this removes the mythologies of multiple gods and nature worship prevalent at the time.
- 2) Problem of Sin. Since Gen 1 says all things created were good, chs 2-3 address the question of why things exist in a ruined condition. Why is there evil? The drama insists that humanity, not God, is to blame for the corruption of God's world. The corrupting power of sin is the primary theme of ch 1-11.
- 3) God's judgment on human sin. In each episode God meets human sin with some form of judgment so that we become aware how serious is this sin problem to God.
- 4) God's sustaining grace. With each judgment there is also grace and mercy, which we will explore as we proceed. The relationship of Primeval and Patriarchal history is that of problem and solution, and is based upon God's gracious initiative on our behalf.

PATRIARCHAL PERIOD: Gen 12-50

Historical background

There is greater certainty about dating with the patriarchal history than with primeval history. Two separate traditions place the patriarchs some four hundred years before the Exodus. Since a particular stele states a hymn of victory that has the first extra-biblical mention of Israel, placing it in Palestine around 1220 B.C., the end of the patriarchal period cannot come

much after 1700 B.C. but could be before that time. It is a group whose lifestyle is that of pastoral nomads, and the story largely takes place in Palestine. There is little historical fact presented in this section of Genesis, since most of the narrative deals with **family** history rather than the history of nations. But much accords with this understanding-

- 1) Kinds of **names** born by the patriarchs are also exemplified among the Amorite population of the period. They are Early West Semitic, belonging to the languages of the West Semitic people group in the second millennium.
- 2) Abraham's **journey** from Haran in Mesopotamia to Canaan (12:4-6) accords well with conditions known to pertain to this era, approx. 2000-1800. Stable, peaceful, prosperous time, with roads open between Canaan and Mesopotamia. Cities named in the narratives actually did exist – Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, Dothan, Salem. **THE MAP OF THE FERTILE CRESCENT** could be given to the students at this time to fill in the location names.
- 3) Nomadic **lifestyle** fits early second millennium. It was a dual society in which villagers and pastoralists were mutually dependent and integrated parts of the same tribal community.
- 4) Various social and legal **customs** are comparable to those of other cultures of the area, but this kind of study is not precise chronologically for dating purposes.
- 5) The patriarchal **religion** reflects an early era. A personal God grants a unilateral covenant and promises of divine protection, and is not associated with places and sanctuaries as gods were among the Canaanites. There is no priest, prophet, cult, or centralized location for worship, as seen in later Israelite religion.

Hence, patriarchs are indeed historical people, not just mythical figures or composites created by later Hebrew writers.

Theology

- 1) Election and promises of God. The promises come in conflict with real life – Abraham is to be a great nation but Sarah is barren; the land belongs to his descendants but Canaanites occupy it (all that Abraham possesses is the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were buried with their wives)
- 2) Transition from patriarchal family to independent nation begins with the story of Joseph. It is one long lesson of God's providence bringing human plots to naught and turning evil into his own good ends.
- 3) Faithfulness and righteousness., Even though Abraham had to abandon all his roots for an uncertain destination, there was still a long period of time before the promise of descendants became reality in one son. Yet Abraham is ultimately seen as believing and faithful (15:6 – "and he believed the Lord and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.").

- 4) Covenant is a central theme of **all** Scripture. It was a formal and binding agreement that formed a bond that did not exist in normal ties of blood or social requirements. For Abraham (and Noah), it is unilateral – only God takes the oath and nothing is required of Abraham, except faith and the following rite of circumcision as a sign of the covenant. Only God lays Himself under obligation, and signifies that by calling Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, adding their names to His own. In **Mosaic** covenant in Exodus, Israel takes the oath and places the nation under the stringent stipulations of the covenant (a bilateral covenant between vassals and a lord).
- 5) The beginning of **redemptive** history. We see the need for it in chs 1-11, we see God's answer beginning to form in the rest of the book of Genesis, that it will be through one people that God will bless all the families of the earth. The salvation promised to Abraham will ultimately embrace all humanity and is the key to understanding all of scripture.

Main Themes of Genesis

- 1) Universal, sovereign God - God of all humanity/all the nations, seeking relationship with all people
- 2) The corrupting power of sin
- 3) Covenant-making God - "I will be your God and you shall be my people" with Adam, Noah, Abraham
- 4) The promises of God to the Patriarchs

The overarching idea is that God's **kingship** is both universal and covenantal. His universal kingship is exercised as a loving and preserving control over His creation. He is the source of all authority and He has decreed His ultimate triumph over all things, particularly the nations. In the OT we also find God's kingly rule identified with a particular people with whom He established covenantal relationship – the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This covenantal relationship today extends to all believers, as they embrace the pledge of obedience on their part and guidance/provision on the part of God.

Subthemes

- 1) God's relationship with humanity based upon four affirmations:
 - a) Preservation in the midst of chaos
 - b) Judgment as a response to sin
 - c) Grace in the midst of judgment
 - d) Consequences of sin
- 2) Our responsibility for our actions vs. God's plan for us
- 3) Blessing (at creation, with Abraham, the desire for blessing in story of Jacob)

Genre

When we look at Genesis, there are two main types of genre present, under general category of "narrative." In Gen 1-11 we see **cosmic epic** – the formative narrative of the cosmos and humanity. Gen 12-36 we see **ancestral epic** – narrative with nationalistic themes present. Both contain historical allusions.

An insightful overview of the book of Genesis with all its incongruities is presented by Philip Yancey, a popular Christian author in America:

"The first 11 chapters of Genesis describe a series of human failures that call the entire creation project into question. As a remedy to those failures, God declares a plan in Genesis 12: to deal with the general problem of humanity by establishing one particular family, a tribe later known as the Hebrews. Through them, the womb for the Incarnation, God will bring about restoration of the entire earth, back to its original design.

That plan declared, God proceeds in a most mysterious manner. To found his tribe, God chooses a pagan from the region now known as Iraq, and puts him through a series of tests, many of which he fails. In Egypt, for example, Abraham demonstrates a morality inferior to that of the sun worshipers.

After promising to bring about a people numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, God then proceeds to conduct a clinic in infertility. Abraham and Sarah wait into their nineties to see their first child; their daughter-in-law, Rebekah, proves barren for a time; her son Jacob must wait 14 years for the wife of his dreams, only to discover her barren as well. Three straight generations of infertile women hardly seems an efficient way to populate a great nation."

(Philip Yancey, "The Bible Jesus Read" Christianity Today, Jan. 11, 1999)

The story of course does not end there. God takes this ragtag family for a detour into Egypt, where they must live for four centuries, until they are led out of there by a murderer on a wretched journey through a desert for 40 yrs. that could have taken only a few weeks. There is no question that God operates on a different timetable than that used by impatient human beings.

CREATION AND EDEN

✓ Genesis Creation: 1:1 – 2:3

** Group Activity: Lessons from Creation

What Genesis 1 tells us positively about God, creation, & man

In small groups, read Genesis chapter 1 together and make three columns so that the groups can list what it says about God, creation, and humans in general terms. What general characteristics does this passage portray about each of these categories?

Ask for the students' insights from their group work. These insights should include:

God

- 1) God is without peer and competitor – one God
No competition with other gods
- 2) Sovereign and all-powerful over the universe and everything in it
- 3) Creator God, also orderer
Corollary – all creatures will fulfill their divinely appointed role only if they adhere to God's plan and directive. God has a purpose and a will for creation, that it be responsive to the Creator in positive ways and hence declare the glory of the Creator.

Creation

- 1) World/universe reflects Creator
 - In order
 - In goodness

The order of creation based upon a coherent plan by God justifies the experimental method and science – this is why other worldviews did not lead to modern science (Far Eastern religions, etc.).
- 2) "Creator creates creation" asserts there is both a distance between the world and God (not pantheism), yet the world belongs to God and has no life without reference to God (no true autonomy, independence, or strict materialism) so there is a closeness as well.

Humans

Disclosure of humanity's true nature

Alone among the creatures, humans specially reflect the image of God:

- 1) Can be addressed directly by God in relationship (1:28), no speech directed to the creation or the animals at all
- 2) God's representative on earth 1:26. His role is to see to it that the creation becomes fully the creation willed by God. Man and woman are agents of God, not slaves of God.
- 3) If we read 2:1-3, we see that the 7th day is one of rest for God and implied as one of rest for man as well. God does not spend the 7th day in exhaustion but in serenity and peace. This is an offer to humanity and a gift if understood properly.
- 4) Everything in creation is made apparently for living creatures' and man's benefit – this is remarkable.

✓ **Rival Views in Ancient Near East**

Genesis 1 portrays a deliberate Hebrew view of creation over rival cosmologies – a polemical repudiation of Babylonian and Egyptian myths. All of these cultures are dealing with understanding **how** and **why** creation, humanity and society are the way that they are (etiology). God used a familiar format known throughout the ANE (Ancient Near East) to communicate His truths vs. their fables. The first part of each number presents an ANE view while the second part (after the "versus") presents the biblical view.

- 1) Multiplicity of gods vs. our single God of the OT
- 2) Struggle of gods to separate upper waters from lower waters
vs. Separation portrayed as simple divine fiat in Gen 1:6-10 – reveals power and sovereignty of God
- 3) Egyptian creation took place through magical utterances
vs. biblical creation through merely the spoken word (more powerful)
- 4) Dragons are rivals which Canaanite gods conquer
vs. great sea monsters are only animals created by God in Gen 1:21
- 5) Worship of sun, moon, stars which were considered to have power over humans
vs. created by God (i.e., creations not gods), lighting the earth and ruling day and night, only surrogates being used of God, lowly roles by ANE standards

We are not given the Hebrew names for sun and moon in the biblical narrative probably to prevent identification with the pagan sun god and pagan moon god, both with names similar to the Hebrew names

for the sun and the moon. The stars are mentioned only as an afterthought (Gen 1:16).

- 6) Babylonian views – creation of man an afterthought to work for gods and provide them with food
vs. creation of man was goal of all creation and God provides man with food

✓ **Controversies today about Creation & Science**

This Genesis chapter should be read primarily as a revelation of the God of creation rather than a scientific statement about the process of creation itself; it explains the "**who**" and the "**why**" (theological issues) not the scientific "how it came to be".

What are the two most important statements we Christians can make about God and man from this passage? Two points to claim:

- 1) GOD is the creator who created everything.
- 2) Man was formed in the IMAGE of God, and therefore is a unique creation.

Application Questions on God and Creation

Literary Techniques

These help to reveal the masterpiece that is Genesis! It is stately, grand high prose of the richest kind, utilizing repetition of words and phrases to represent this first and most powerful event in all of time and space.

Repetition of words and phrases in 1:1 through 2:3

- 1) Number of times a specific word or phrase recurs is important to Hebrew thought. It is a form of emphasis. Three times indicates something is **important**. Seven times indicates something is whole or complete.

God: 35 times (7x5), Earth 21 times (7x3), Heaven/firmament 21 times, "And God made..." 7 times, "It was so" 7 times, "God saw it was good" 7 times.

Structural elements

- 1) Separating and subduing
Day one: light from darkness
Day two: air from water
Day three: earth from water
Day four: day from night

- Creating and filling
Day three: vegetation
Day four: sun, moon, stars
Day five: birds & fish
Day six: animals & humans

2) Structure highlights 3rd and 6th days

Double announcement of divine word "And God said..."

Double approval formula "it was good"

Correspondence in contents 3= land and plants 6=animals and man who live on land and eat plants. Days 3 and 6 both contain two acts of creation each while other days only one act each.

3) Emphasis on man's creation also important. Instead of "Let there be..." pattern repeated elsewhere, we find in v. 26 "Let us make..." Also, instead of "...after their kind" pattern, there is now "...in our image, after our likeness." We break the mold! This change in wording stresses how this item of creation is different, honored, and important.

4) Day seven stands out from rest in 2:2-3: three-fold mention of the 7th day.

In 2:4 a statement is made, then it is repeated in reverse order in the original Hebrew. This is called a **chiasmus** (explain term – parallel line reverses order of units found in initial line): **(write on board)**

Heavens	earth	created
Made	earth	heavens

A chiasmus is also used in 1:27 to show emphasize the importance of human beings: **(write on board)**

Created	God (man)	in His image
In image	God	created (him)

Why a chiasmus? It is used for emphasis throughout OT.

✓ **The Garden of Eden 2:4 – 3:24**

v. 2:4 is the first genealogy, which usually functions as a heading and introduction to the following narratives. The purpose of the creation in ch. 1 points to mankind and their story as the apex for the original creation of the heavens and the earth. But as ch 1 results in praise and doxology for God, the creation story beginning in ch. 2 ends in alienation. (Brueggemann 40)

2 Parts of the Garden story:

- 1) Chapter 2: Creation of man and his wife
- 2) Chapter 3: Temptation and fall from garden

Note: the word "fall" is never used in the Bible in the way we mean. OT does not have a strong assumption concerning the fall. Dt 30:11-14 is characteristic in its assumption that humanity can indeed obey the purposes of God. (Brueggemann 41) Hosea 6:7 comes close as prophet looks back over Israel's history when it states that the Israelites have transgressed the covenant like Adam did. But it is Paul's teaching that has clarified this concept, without using the precise word we use today. Paul clearly talks of the first Adam's disobedience affecting all generations of mankind in Ro 5:12ff; 1 Cor 15:22.

Overview of Eden ch. 2 & 3

Structure

Tightly structured with opening and closing scenes:

Action begins outside of garden, dialogues conducted within the garden, and decisive act of disobedience takes place at its very center (3:3), then moves out from there as humans hide from God, finally they are sent out of garden.

Name of God

Yahweh Elohim, using **both** names together occurs only once in the Pentateuch outside of Gen 2-3 (Ex 9:30). Within chapters 2 and 3 the two names appear together **20** times! The name Yahweh seems to indicate God as Israel's covenant partner (relational), while God's name of Elohim seems to indicate God's role as creator of all creation. This emphasis is important since serpent and woman avoid the term Yahweh in their discussion 3:1-5, only using Elohim there.

Exegesis

v. 7: Play on words, pun, (**paronomasia**) on name "Adam" and land "adamah" in Hebrew, to emphasize the relationship of man to the land. Created from it, man's job is to cultivate it, on death he returns to it.

Interdependence important part of creation – the human needs the garden for food, the garden needs the human to cultivate it.

v. 9: Tree of knowledge of good and evil. This is the only time this tree is presented in scripture. There have been many possibilities proposed as to what this means. Possibilities include seeking moral discernment or becoming aware of the difference between right and wrong. But man was expected to exercise moral discretion prior to eating the fruit or there would be no basis for God to give his command in the first place. Is knowledge itself an evil for humanity and ignorance to be desired? This does not seem to be the issue nearly as much as the issue of trusting God's word about a situation. The revealed will/law of God amounted to the warning "do not eat of this tree" on pain of death. Hence, the sin appears to be a desire for moral autonomy, deciding what is right without reference to **God's** revealed **will**, thus a willful independence from God.

v. 10-14: There has been much conjecture on the location of Eden in recent times, but the geography presented is insoluble and is probably meant by God to be unknown.

v. 15-17: Before the fall man is expected to work, it is intrinsic to human life. Work is not a sin or the result of sin, but a God-given blessing on human beings.

v. 18: Against the seven-fold refrain that "God saw it was good" in ch 1, divine observation here that something was not right is startling. This emphasizes the importance of finding companionship for man. God is not to be this earthly helper, and through progression we learn that other creatures are not the helpers. The Hebrew word "helper" must be understood in the context of OT. It occurs 21 times in OT and on 15 of those occasions it refers to God helping man in one way or another – a fact that casts doubt on the common suggestion that woman as man's helper was in some way subordinate or inferior. (Briscoe 52). The compound prepositional phrase "suitable for him" gives the notion of a complimentary, rather than an identical, being.

v. 19-20: Delay in provision by naming of animals creates suspense and heightens need. Also showed no animal is an equal of man. Naming something is to have authority over it in Hebrew culture, so God has given humans authority over His creatures.

v. 21-25: "not made out of his head to top him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved." (Matthew Henry's commentary) The Hebrew word for rib can also be translated "side". This "alongside" relationship receives more support when we consider the expression "helper". (Briscoe 49)

Application Questions on Eden Before the Fall

THE FALL ~ IN TWO PARTS

√ The Fall

The problem of sin: We hold three suppositions

1. God is all-powerful
2. God is all good
3. Sin exists & is real.

God is all-powerful but has chosen to limit his power when creating other beings, specifically humans who are created in God's **image**. They have some power of self-determination (though not as full and complete as God's); otherwise they would not be creatures made in his image or a being in its own right. Such self-determination in the form of freedom to choose good or evil does not require an evil world, only the possibility of evil – hence God did not create evil when he created humans. Sin was not a necessity, only a possibility.

Ultimately God is not the author or the cause of sin but he created humanity with an endowed freedom of **choice**. And in so doing, knew the risk of human kind opting to rebel, thus the possibility of moral evil. Humans are undeniably responsible for their own evil.

Yet though God did not create evil, Christ fully participated in the risks associated with free humanity. And He personally suffered as He gave Himself as the ultimate atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. God provided the means by which all sin may be overcome (through Jesus Christ). This demonstrates God's ultimate and total goodness.

Still the question: Where did the very first evil arise? We do not know, but it appears as a tempting serpent in the garden, shown as coming from outside of humanity and definitely not from God. This serpent is later associated with Satan. Adam and Eve sought autonomous (**self-ruling**) freedom that does not discern the God-given boundaries of human life. They were lured into believing there are securities apart from the reality of God. They were seduced to turn from the covenanting "Thou" of true relationship, to the autonomous "I" of false security, false well-being, and self-centeredness. The result is always anxiety and alienation. (Brueggemann 54)

Exegesis

Now let's look at these important verses in greater detail:

v. 3:1: The snake as an anti-God symbol is very appropriate in Hebrew thought. But note that he isn't referred to as Satan or the devil here. The snake is shrewd in **distorting** what God has said in his question. He doesn't tell the woman to disobey God and cannot even be accused of directly lying. He casts doubt and at a profound level his words are totally misleading.

v. 2-3: Woman corrects the snake but not accurately. It appears she only heard the words from Adam, not directly from God. Also refers to God as **only** Elohim, not LORD God. She seems to be moving away from God towards the serpent's attitude. How does Eve hedge, fixate upon and amplify God's commands, and how does this play into the serpent's schemes?

v. 4-5: The snake is uttering half-truths. Expulsion from the garden was a true kind of **death**, though not yet physical (Adam lived to be 930 years). He appealed to curiosity, to desire for more knowledge, and for independence from and equality with God.

v. 6-8: The humans are usurping the divine prerogatives (rights and privileges) as well as explicitly disobeying God's express word. There is the obvious ethical element of volition on their parts. (Brueggemann 48) The knowledge of good and evil, which they now acquired experimentally and experientially as opposed to academically, was that "good" is doing the will of God and "evil" is the converse (opposite). (Briscoe 59)

v. 9: The Lord knew where man was, so the question "where are you?" is essentially rhetorical, to express the **loss** of relationship between God and man.

v. 10: "I was afraid." This is the same answer that will be given by Abraham (20:11) and then Isaac (26:9) and by all who cannot trust the goodness of God and submit to His wise plan for their lives. Note the emphasis on "I" in vv. 10-13, as a obsession on self has replaced a vocation for care and tending of the creation. (Brueggemann 49) Note also that three of mankind's perennial problems – guilt, shame, and fear – have been introduced into what had been a place of delight and peace. (Briscoe 61)

v. 12-13: Here we see the divisive effects of sin – setting man against his dearest companion and alienating him from his all-caring creator. We encounter typical sinful answers by both humans of blame-shifting, pointing to circumstances, fate and others to justify themselves.

v. 16: Neither man nor woman is cursed, only the snake (14) and soil (17) are cursed because of man. Sentences heaped on man and woman are a disruption of, or hardship in their appointed roles. Woman is told that her desire for independence will conflict with her desire for her husband and his demand for submission. This is the result of the Fall, not God's perfect will

for marriages. Those who were created to be one flesh will find themselves tearing each other apart.

v. 17-19: The sentence on man is the longest and fullest, since he bore the greatest responsibility in following his wife's advice instead of heeding God's instructions given personally and directly to him. The woman was more easily deceived because she had not received the word directly from God. The woman's punishment struck at the deepest root of her being as wife and mother; man's strikes at his work, his activity and provision for sustenance, his deepest root. But the miracle is not that they are punished, but that they live. God's **grace** is seen in the very judgment against them.

v. 21: God's final grace-filled kindness is to make clothing for them – of great significance in that society. The first animal is killed in order to do so. Clothing provides a protective function but also is the most pervasive of human symbols concerning a person's position and role in society.

v. 24: Powerful symbols here can be interpreted in light of the later tabernacle design. The Garden of Eden was a perfect sanctuary, where God was uniquely present in all His life-giving power. It was this that man lost when he ate the fruit. God gives a less-than-perfect substitute later to his chosen people through the tabernacle - his presence among his people in an imperfect way. It is only through Jesus that one can once again enter into God's presence and the Garden of Eden will not be fully recreated until the new heavens and earth come into being after the Second Coming of Jesus.

How do we look at Gen 3? A pattern or paradigm for each person (each of us is the Adam of our own soul) or a proto-history for the species of humanity? Wenham states:

It is paradigmatic in that it offers a clear and simple analysis of the nature of sin and its consequences, albeit in rich and symbolic language. Disobedience to the law of God brings physical pain and suffering and alienation from him. This is indeed the experience of every man. In this sense the story is paradigmatic. But in all societies, and especially the tightly knit family society of ancient Israel, the behavior of parents has great impact on their children for good or ill. It therefore follows that the disobedience of the first couple from whom Genesis traces the descent of the whole human race must have had grave consequences for all mankind. In this sense, then, the story offers a protohistorical account of man's origins and his sin.

Each person's disobedience to the law and desire of God is each person's personal sin, while the grave consequence for all mankind of Adam and Eve's actions is what we call original sin, sin nature, or depravity. Be certain that all students understand these two concepts and how both are portrayed in Genesis 2 and 3. How does God deal with these two kinds of sin? With our

personal sin, he forgives us when we truly repent of the sin. With our sin nature, God cleanses our hearts with his Holy Spirit when we commit ourselves totally to his authority in our lives.

The Image of God

Let us now look at an aspect of these first three chapters that is important to understand if we are to recognize the basic identity of all humanity: how we are all made in the image of God. What does this term signify?

- 1) We must recognize and accept our image role – of #1 importance, we are reflectors of the Creator, not creators ourselves. We are **dependent** on, not independent of God. Obviously this is where Adam and Eve went wrong.
- 2) We must live out our imagehood by doing what God does: a) being fruitful and multiplying by participating in procreation, our form of creation and b) being a steward of the earth and sharing dominion by helping build and maintain a universe marked by right relations and peaceful order. We experience our true imagehood as we are in living relationship with our Lord, other humans, and His creation, no longer alienated from Him.

Since there is such an emphasis in scripture on relationship, another view of the image is based on relationship. Hence, the original imago dei includes 1) **freedom for God** to be in relation with Him as we were in Eden, 2) **freedom for the other** recognizes the social aspect of our image and fits well with our understanding of God as Trinity, 3) **Freedom from the Earth** in that man is to be the steward of and care for creation but it does not dominate man, 4) **Freedom from self** wherein we are focused on God rather than on ourselves. Sin is loss of relation with God and these freedoms, with the freedom to choose to return to God restored only by prevenient grace. (Dunning 278-283).

Our Failure of Imagehood – what was lost in the Garden?

- 1) Human sin becomes a downward spiral – eating of the forbidden tree, Cain murders, antediluvians fill earth with wickedness, Tower people want a great name. Humans manifest their determination to reject their given imagehood, disobey God and hence destroy the relationship with Him, and become gods, rather than reflect the one true God.
- 2) Judgment falls. Adam and Eve die – not just an end of physical life, but a collapse of all relationships at all levels and a spiritual death of man in his relationship with God. Death is not an arbitrary punishment for sin but is a true representation of what sin really is. Sin causes death and isolation from others.

Hence we see several immediate and long range consequences:

- Break of relationship with God 3:10
- Break of relationship between man and woman 3:12

- Break of relationship of humanity with the created order 3:17-19
- Break of other familial relationships (siblings – 4:8), later extending into all of society
- Finally, cosmic breakdown when God sends the flood and a return to primordial waters of chaos

God graciously intervenes. Though sin was judged in each situation that arose during the Primeval Period, grace was also given:

- God clothes Adam and Eve
- Cain receives a mark protecting him from harm
- Noah and his family survive the flood
- People are scattered after the Tower of Babel to fill the earth rather than be destroyed

Application Questions: After the Fall

√ **Cain and Abel**

The next generation: note a characteristic of Genesis is to trace mankind's descent from Adam in a series of deviations from the normal way of things in that culture – for example, when a man has 2-3 sons, it is often the younger son who receives God's favor. We see this beginning here – When Abel is killed, God's blessing is not on Cain but on Seth.

Thematic and Structural comparisons

Parallels with Garden of Eden (chapter 4 presented, then chapter 3)

- 1) Questions are similar: Where is Abel? 4:9//Where are you? 3:9 What have you done? 4:10/3:17
- 2) Cursing – you are cursed from the land 4:11//land is cursed because of you 3:17
- 3) Marking of Cain 4:15 parallels clothing of Adam and Eve 3:21 = indicates their sin as well as God's grace
- 4) Cain on sin: Its urge is for you, but you must rule over it 4:7//your urge will be to your husband, but he shall rule over you 3:16.
- 5) Hearing and voice in both 4:10/3:10
- 6) You have driven me from the surface of the land 4:14//the Lord drove man out of the garden 3:24
- 7) Stories end with sinners leaving the presence of God and going to live east of Eden 4:16/3:24

But differences as well – not just a rerun of the fall

- 1) Already alienation exists in the Cain and Abel event because of Adam and Eve's original sin/depravity – Eve has to be persuaded to sin while

Cain is not dissuaded even by God. Also the judgment of Adam and Eve is not challenged by them but Cain protests his judgment.

- 2) Sin has now moved from neglect of God's word to murder and will soon spread to infect all of mankind (Arnold 56)
- 3) Cain is actually cursed while Adam and Eve are not – a serious further development

Why is Cain's offering rejected, Abel's is accepted by God?

The answer is not clear in the text, but possibilities include:

- 1) God prefers shepherds to gardeners, however this is not likely since Adam in 2:15 is told by God to be a gardener
- 2) Animal sacrifice is somehow better than vegetable offerings but this does not account for the necessity of grain offerings found throughout the Pentateuch as well
- 3) God's motives may be inscrutable here
- 4) Perhaps the best explanation is taken from Heb 11:4 "by faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain". This could indicate that the brothers may have had differing attitudes and motives. Perhaps Cain already had bad attitudes toward Abel. Abel's offering is given by faith and Cain's is not. Cain's heart may already have been turned against God. Proper worship may be seen in the quality of the gifts and the intent of one's heart. Since this is the first account of sacrifice by humans to God, the fundamental principle of giving the best and first may be very important here. Cain offered fruit but not firstfruits while Abel offered firstlings and the fat of his flock – the best part.

Cain's responsibility

v. 4:7 Cain is not a victim of original sin to such an extent that he is not **responsible** for what he does. He can choose and act for the good. He is free and capable of faithful living, if he so chooses. This is clearly specified by God. Yet sin is not just breaking a rule, it is an inner aggressive force ready to pounce on Cain. Sin is lethal and God warns Cain that he must be on his guard. "If you do well" implies that Cain could turn to his brother and be reconciled to both him and to God. But Cain refuses to do so.

Importance of blood

v. 4:10 "your brother's blood is crying to me": a whole theology is found here – life is in the blood, shed blood is the most polluting of all substances. It pollutes the holy land so it becomes unfit for the divine presence. Here the pollution results in the land not yielding its fruit to Cain. Blood is needed to be shed for the forgiveness of sins (later witnessed in the tabernacle sacrifices, the ultimate sacrifice being Christ Himself).

The consequences of Cain's sin

. . . for himself

v. 4:12 being driven away from his family as well as the land – the fate in tribal societies for a murderer of relatives. Cain’s relationship with the Lord is broken as well. This leads to a fear of other men since no divine or familial protection is any longer available to him.

Cain settles in the land of Nod (v. 16), which is east of Eden. Nod means “wandering”, the divine sentence placed upon him (a paronomasia). A reminder of his sin but also clearly the reality of God’s grace through protection come together in the mark bestowed upon him, since it is because of the mark that others will not kill him. There is a fearfulness that always stalk those who are unreconciled and guilty.

. . . for his offspring – sin everywhere, but also ~

Emergence of culture, music & poetry

Invention of **music** in v. 21 accompanies **poetry** in vv. 23-4 – a superb example of an early Hebrew poem:

Parallelism – repetition of same or related content or structure in consecutive lines or verses. Parallelism is the MOST PROMINENT characteristic of Hebrew poetry.

Explain and illustrate the three kinds of Hebrew parallelism:

- 1) Synonymous. The second line has similar meaning to the first line – v. 23 in this chapter and also 49:7.
- 2) Antithetic. The second line is a contrast to the first – Prov 10:1.
- 3) Synthetic. Succeeding lines give specifics of the first line – Is 1:16c-17.

Hebrew poetry also uses chiasms and word pairs, but not rhyming. Give an example of rhyming in English poetry, then discuss how rhyming is used in tribal languages.

The students can practice synonymous and antithetic parallelism in the parallelism exercise

Two Enochs and two Lamaks are found in the genealogy from Cain and Seth, clearly specified as different people.

Lamak in 4:19-23

A downward spiral. Sin is pervading everything! All human activity is affected by sin now. Lamak supplants God’s law with his own. He takes his own revenge however and on whomever he wants. Lamak wants to be like God and is revealing his own self-centeredness with his repeated references to “I” and “me”. Everyone is at risk from him!

Application Questions to Cain and Abrahame!

✓ **Seth's Hope 4:25-26**

Three rays of hope appear amid the bleakness of sin:

- 1) Name – another child in place of Abel, this will be the chosen line
- 2) "Men began to call upon the name of the Lord"
 - a. possible beginning of public worship referred to here
 - b. this reference is linked with Seth's line, not Cain's
- 3) Seth is later linked with Noah – Noah is named to be the rest and comfort of his people (5:29). His father hopes he will reverse the destiny of living with the consequences of sin. Noah seems to hold the promise of a new beginning. (Brueggemann 68, 70) Noah in turn is linked to the Patriarchs through his son, Shem.

✓ **Genealogies – Chapters 4 & 5**

In ANE, genealogies performed the important function of legitimizing royal dynasties and registering the changing political claims of leaders. A new king would have a new genealogy written that linked his name through his previous generations to known gods of the region, hence gaining authority for his own name and rule. The major function of Genesis genealogies differed significantly from ANE ones.

Specific purposes

In Genesis and the OT, genealogies were used to trace the line of the chosen family (and other important relationships to that family), hence a predominantly theological function revealing God's intentions for humanity. Hence the purpose did not deal with any political legitimation, but for religious affirmation.

Ch 5 links the first founder of humanity, Adam, with its re-founder, Noah. While this lengthy genealogy traces mankind from creation to flood, a parallel extended genealogy in ch. 11 traces mankind from the flood to Abraham. (Brueggemann 67) These genealogies measure the passage of time in an orderly sequence, but based in terms of father and son rather than centuries or absolute dates.

Generic purposes

In general, genealogies provide continuity in the narrative, linking important events and people together. They also provide convenient breaks in the narrative, in order to separate one story from the next and prepare us for the next one to come.

RE-CREATION

Chapter 6

Marriages between the daughters of men and the sons of gods. This is a well known feature of Greek, Egyptian, Ugaritic, Hurrian, and Mesopotamian theology – there is no biblical emphasis on this but on God’s judgment instead.

Three main interpretations through the centuries concerning who are the sons of the gods/God (Elohim in Hebrew)

1. Angels (oldest and most common today) both Hebrew and Christian - seen elsewhere in Bible: Ps 29:1, Job 1:6 -- “angel” can be thought of as “spirit” and thus can be satanic since the Satan is called one of the sons of God in Job 1 & 2.

2. Superior men such as kings or rulers: Ps 82. Davidic king called God’s son in 2 Sam 7:14 and Ps 2:7.

3. Seth’s descendants – this interpretation avoided the problem of angels having intercourse.

Though the interpretation is uncertain, it is definitely evil:

Humans desiring to be like God just as with Adam and Eve. This section may present God’s motivation for the coming judgment.

Limitation of Age 120 years - 6:3

This limitation indicates God’s displeasure and power to control life (His sovereignty) but it did not happen immediately.

Noah lived 950 years. Post flood there was a steady decline so possible only a gradual implementation over time.

By the time of Moses, the greatest age to be reached was approximately Moses=120/Aaron = 123.

Often in Gen the conclusion of one section hints at themes to be developed in next, so 6:5-8 introduces Noah & his righteousness in face of others’ sins.

✓ Prelude to the Flood 6:1-8

6:5: Sin’s spread

6:6: God’s grief – sin **grieves** the Father heart of God.

The Lord repents: word can also mean “was sorry” or deeply grieved.

It is God’s reaction to human sinfulness and reveals a personal and caring God. The evil heart of mankind troubles the heart of God deeply. The text affirms that God is decisively impacted by the suffering, hurt, and reactions of his creation – He is not an unfeeling creator. Ultimately this reality is proven in the pain and suffering of our Savior for us upon the cross.

(Brueggemann 77)

6:8: Noah's favor. Very rare for a specific person to have found favor in God's sight – equates Noah with Moses in Ex 33:17 and Mary in NT. Noah seems to be the first person who has character – he says no word but listens and obeys.

**** Homework Assignment: The Epic of Gilgamesh**

Read the epic of Gilgamesh and compare/contrast according to the directions given above. See discussion below.

The Flood = new creation/second re-creation

Literary structure

Story of Noah is a favorite pattern/structure of Hebrew narrators: Palistrophe or extended chiasmus ****Refer to Flood Chart**** at the back of the Student Workbook. This surface structure mirrors the deep structure of the event being described (entering the ark, water rising, God remembers, water going down, exiting the ark), so it is very appropriate. Note especially the number chiasmus on the Flood Chart.

Stories of a great flood are known in cultures throughout this entire region. The closest parallel to Genesis is from Mesopotamia – the Epic of Gilgamesh.

Why are there these similarities in a flood story?

The Epic was written before 1600 BC. Noah's story was written down later since its earliest written form would have been around 1200 BC at the time of Moses. It appears there was a common historical heritage of a flood and each culture presented its own understanding of what had taken place. Only Israelites had the truth of the real God of the universe behind their "story."

**** Homework Assignment: Differences are important!**

The first part below is from the Bible flood story, the second part is from the Epic.

1. Monotheistic theology // polytheistic mythology
2. Stern moral tone revealing a moral, just God // pettiness of motives among the gods
3. God's sovereignty and control – omniscience & omnipotence // effect of flood reveals gods' weaknesses and inability to control the events
4. Sacrifice to please God // feeding frenzy of gods who are now hungry (fed by sacrifices)
5. Totality of God's single authority // no agreement or action in concert by gods

6. God is personal and rewards righteousness // gods are fearful, greedy, ignorant, jealous
7. Builds up character of God // decreases character of gods
8. Diminishes importance of human hero // builds up human hero
9. Human greatness = obedience to God: 3 times God commands Noah 7:5-16 // heroic feats and outsmarting gods by the human being
10. Conscious rejection of any implication at population control: 3 times "be fruitful and multiply" 8:17; 9:1,7 // flood is sent to destroy man because there are too many humans and they are too noisy

√ The Flood Chapters 6 - 9

Exegesis

v. 13: Since the earth is corrupt and filled with violence because of humans, God says he is "about to destroy them WITH the earth". This is a case of the punishment fitting the crime – a favorite principle of biblical law, seen again shortly with the Tower of Babel.

v. 14: Hebrew word for ark: the only other time it is used, Moses is hidden in an ark (basket of bulrushes). This is not the same Hebrew word as Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle.

v. 18: First appearance of the key term "covenant", also 9:9-10. God shows Himself ready to meet with people, to promise a **relationship** with them, and to outline the details of behavior which will make this promised relationship a redeeming, wholesome one in which we are reconciled with God. Covenant becomes the means of relationship throughout the Old and New Testaments. Testament means covenant! (Briscoe 92)

Parallels with Genesis Chapter One

Animals

v. 19-20: Animals reflect the description found in Gen 1:

- Male and female (1:27)
- According to types or after their kind (1:21,24,25)
- sequence of birds, land animals, creeping things the same
- All indicates a **NEW CREATION**.

Chapter 7

Why 2 lists of animals, some of twos and some of sevens? (7:2-3 vs. 6:19-20). The purpose of 7:2-3 is seen only after the flood: birds reconnoiter the earth and the clean animals/birds are offered in sacrifice – without extras, there would have been an extinction of the ones allowed to be sacrificed.

Reversing acts of separation = return to chaos

v. 11: God releases waters pent up below and above the earth – undoing the great acts of separation whereby dry land created and waters confined in ch 1. Now the earth returns to its original state, first described in 1:2.

Covering up dry land with water

v. 17-24: Repeated 6 times “earth and waters” like ch 1, but in an opposite movement.

Dying animals – same order as when created

v. 21-22: Dying creatures listed in same order as their creation.

Chapter 8

8:1: God remembered Noah: this is the turning point of the narrative. When God remembers, He acts!

(seen again with Abraham and Lot, Rachel with Joseph’s birth, etc.)

Divinely sent wind

Gen 1:2 Spirit of God moved over the surface of the waters vs. 8:1 God caused a wind to pass over and the waters subsided (same Hebrew word Ruach for spirit and wind).

v. 6-14: Scientific experimentation in 3 parts – favorite Hebrew format. Other sailors of the time would also use birds to discover if land was close.

Be fruitful & multiply for animals

v. 15-16: Start of a new creation: “be fruitful & multiply” for every living creature

v. 20: 1st altar in scripture and 1st “burnt offerings” – human desire for **reconciliation** with God

v. 21: Sacrifice and burnt offerings. Noah’s sacrifice appears to be effective for all mankind. God is not lifting the curse on the ground (3:17) but he is promising not to add to it with another flood.

Chapter 9

Be fruitful & multiply for man

Echoing 1:28 very precisely. This is repeated twice, at 9:1 and 9:7.

Directions on eating

9:1-7 Modifies food directions of 1:29 regarding plants (man now eats meat as well) and specifies the sanctity of human life. God is directly presenting a respect for all life and the giver of life in general with the abstention not to eat the blood of animals. God is also presenting his high view of human life

in v. 6. This is a barrier against dehumanization, an affirmation about human life and worth. Humans are different from animals since all humans have been created in the image of God. (Brueggemann 83)

Reference to image of God

v. 6: Principle of **lex talionis** (an eye for an eye, a life for a life). Note the tight chiastic formulation: **(write on board)**

shed	blood of	man
man	blood	shed

v. 9: Covenant! This covenant is unilateral, since God is making a promise to keep the covenant without reservation. Other covenants will come: Abrahamic, Mosaic (at Mt. Sinai), Davidic. Both Noah and Abraham are brought into the covenant by God because of their faith in God which results in their obeying Him.

9:18-29 coda to Noah - what do we see? Sin hasn't disappeared or been washed away. Though sin had been judged by the flood, it had not been eradicated. The flood has affected no change in humanity, only in God's relationship with His creation.

Note fall of Noah involves food, just as with Adam & Eve

v. 20-22: Ham shows clear disrespect for his father. The emphasis here is on Ham, not Noah and the other two sons who were shown to be modest. (Brueggemann 90)

v. 25: This is the first time a man is recorded as uttering a curse – being a slave is repeated three times so it is very emphatic.

Why does Noah curse "Canaan", not Ham? This family narrative is used to explain political realities, the domination of Israel over Canaan and their enmity. Note that we see this later as well, with Isaac-Ishmael (Israel and Arab peoples), Jacob-Esau (with Edomites). It is an explanation of other people groups who do not depend upon Yahweh but go their own way, just as Ham does his own indecent thing, without regard for God's decency rules. (Brueggemann 90) We have seen a disruption of relationships, first between husband and wife, then siblings, now parent and child.

Differences with creation

Though we've noted various links in chs 6-8 with the creation story of Genesis chapter 1, yet this situation is different.

- The ground is still cursed but now the curse is extended further: enmity between man and animals in general is noted, not just with the snake (9:2)
- consumption of meat is specified

- Noah surrounded by sinful men including his own family and himself
- only one group of descendants is cursed (Ham), not all humans
- the curse is by man on man rather than by God.

Flood is a great turning point in the history of the world

The story reveals the lessons that

1. God's hatred of and judgment against sin extends to the point of possible total destruction of the earth
2. God's great mercy is revealed in extending safety to Noah and his family during the flood
3. God's great mercy is also revealed towards life on earth – the earth is now promised God's sustaining grace through a covenant
4. Even the most righteous person and offspring may fall from grace into sin in an unguarded moment. Such falls have long term consequences.

Noah's view in NT

Noah is regarded as an example of faith & righteousness: Heb 11:7; 2 Pet 2:5; 1 Pet 3:20.

<i>Application Questions to the Flood</i>

√ From Flood to Babel

Table of Nations and Tower of Babel – 10:1-32 and 11:1-9:

These are linked by key words such as: scatter, spread out, country of Shinar, build, also by multiples of 7 which disappear if one separates the two sections.

Though it seems confusing to have people groups with different languages in ch. 10, then people with one language at the beginning of ch. 11, 11 is used to explain 10. Ch. 10 raises the question, "what happened?" The dispersal of mankind and divisions revealed in ch. 10 are explained in ch. 11 as God's judgment on man's attempts to make a name for himself and to reach for the heavens.

The Table of Nations – Chapter 10

The three-fold division of mankind deals with each of Noah's sons. Each son's list opens and closes with a regular formula. The introduction and conclusion (at verses 1 and 32) are neat inclusios (bookends) with similar words. "The nations were separated" anticipates the great dispersal at Babel about to be discussed.

Japheth's group comes first, as the group of people with which Israel had least contact – it is the most brief of the three sections.

Ham – represents the group of Israel’s most influential neighbors and enemies, the mixed races in the land of Canaan. It was important to point out their relationship to the blessing and cursing of Noah’s offspring.

Shem – his offspring is listed last because this is the chosen line that will be presented again after the Tower episode.

Differences are found between the genealogies in chs. 5 and 11. Here there are no ages mentioned and the emphasis is on peoples/nations more than on individuals. But the point is obvious, that all mankind known to Israel is descended from a single stock – all men are sons of Noah as well as sons of Adam. This genealogy insists on **continuity** so that Israel is properly placed among the nations in relationship, but also **discontinuity** as Israel is the offspring of something new and different that God is going to do with one particular nation, not all nations. (Brueggemann 88)

The Tower of Babel – Chapter 11: 1-9

The record of the first human attempt to create a universal kingdom reveals fallen humanity’s insecurity, rebellion and self-centeredness. This is the first time it takes place on a corporate, political level. The last state of pre-Israelite humanity is that “they did not listen” to God (11:7). And when creation does not listen, it cannot respond as God’s creature. Nevertheless the caller still calls, urging the world to answer. (Brueggemann 18)

Structure

This story begins and ends with bookends: v. 1 “the whole earth used the same language”; v. 9 “the Lord confused the language of the whole earth”. v. 5 (scene 3) is the center of the story – it is the hinge or turning point.

Scenes 1-2 human deeds

Scene 3 inspection of the tower by God (the hinge of the story)

Scenes 4-5 divine actions

ANE Context

There are no ANE parallel stories of this kind. This story may be mocking Babylonian boasts about their temples (since it takes place in Babylon – Shinar, v. 2), which included fancy brickwork (see v. 3 with comparison of building techniques in Israel of rock with Babylonian buildings made of fired bricks), and their vaulted height reaching to the heavens. The tower may even be a reference to a Babylonian ziggurat, a temple constructed as a stepped mountain and made out of clay. Babylon shows man’s folly, not his wisdom, man’s impotence before the judgment of God. **DRAW ZIGGURAT ON THE BOARD for the students.**

NOTE IRONY: “let us make a name lest we be scattered over the face of the whole earth” is precisely what they fail to achieve – they are ultimately

scattered by God, and the name given their construction commemorates their failure, not their success. The punishment fits their crime. This ancient skyscraper may be another human effort to become like God, or reach his location under their own power in order to glorify themselves.

v. 5: There is an emphasis on God having to come down in order to see their work – it is a dramatic way to express the puniness of man’s greatest achievements when compared to the Creator.

v. 8: Expulsion from one’s former home has also been seen with the Fall and Cain narratives.

The narrative builds towards the explanation of the name of Babylon, “Babel”, in v.9. Babylonians understood the name Babel to mean “the gate of the god”, but Hebrews used the name to mean “mixed up, confused” and characterized it as under divine judgment, rather than the height of human accomplishment.

Let’s review these two important episodes and why they are so important:

Purpose of the Table of Nations

A neutral description which is unique in world literature.

The Table is linked genealogically to the sons of Noah and presents all the people groups known to the ANE at that time, revealing how all men are ultimately brothers, hence the brotherhood of humanity.

- *How is the brotherhood of humanity understood here?*
- *Is this something that would be an important topic on which to preach in our churches?*

The tendency exists today in the nationalistic or ethnic aspirations of people when they ignore the link of God’s image that joins all humanity together, whenever an idolatrous exaltation of one cultural identity emerges and assumes a hostile stance toward neighboring peoples. We Christians must expose the idolatry latent in nationalism and tribalism, be it in places like Bosnia, Rwanda, or the USA. (Glasser 42-43)

This theme of universal brotherhood has been repeated three times now, with Adam, Noah, and now with this Table. Remember that it is important whenever anything is repeated three times in Hebrew writings.

But ...

Purpose of the Babel Story

This story corrects the impression that man was fulfilling God’s command to scatter and fill the earth in brotherly accord and obedience. It is the last

great judgment that befell mankind in primeval history. It also presents a strong polemic against Babylonian pretensions to greatness. The motives which prompted man's efforts were horrific – a desire to displace God from heaven, to make a name for oneself rather than allow God to do this, and to scheme without reference to God's declared will, prompts judgment that will cripple man's attempts at cooperation once and for all. The narrative is a protest against every effort at unity and oneness derived from human self-sufficiency and autonomy from God. (Brueggemann 100) Never again will it be easy for different groups to work together, at least not until it is reversed in Acts 2 with the coming of the Holy Spirit and speaking in known languages. The Tower of Babel will not be reversed until Pentecost! There the many languages are united again to hear the one, **uniting message** of the gospel.

Though there is fierce condemnation in this story, yet even here there is **grace** – they are not killed but only scattered so they could not continue in their sin, and will actually be fulfilling God's directive to "multiply and fill the earth". The nations are being blessed in the very act of judgment!

Genealogy of Shem – Chapter 11:10-26

This represents a bridge between primeval history and the patriarchal stories, linking the people of one with the other. Fathering three sons links Adam, Noah, and Terah. The generations from Adam to Noah before the flood are 10, while this listing of generations from Shem to Abraham after the flood also contains 10 generations. The patriarchal history is arranged so that a short genealogy (toledoth) alternates with a long family history of one of the key characters.

Ch. 11 - This is where primeval history and sacred history dovetail. The main theme of the primeval history is the corrupting power of sin. God meets this sin with judgment but also with sustaining grace. The primeval prologue prepares the way for the history of redemption. The relationship is one of problem and solution. Its chapters carry utmost importance for understanding all of Scripture. The desperate problem of human sin so poignantly portrayed in Gen 1-11 is solved by God's gracious initiative, already intimated in the prologue, but sounded strongly in the promise of land and posterity to Abraham. The answer is God's choosing and formation of a distinct group of people, the Israelites, from whom the Savior of the world will come. (Lasor 31).

God chooses Abraham for the sake of all humanity, not just for future Israel.

Application Questions to the Tower of Babel

THE FIRST PATRIARCH

✓ **Patriarchal History – Chapters 12 - 50**

Lifestyle of the Patriarchs

Semi-nomadic – they move from place to place when the situation demands it but sometimes stay for long periods in one place making agreements with local townspeople. Their main occupation is keeping flocks and herds, but sometimes they sow and raise crops. Since this is quite different than the average person during the monarchy period, it suggests that Genesis enshrines a valid historical reminiscence of earlier times. But it is difficult to specify dates via social customs since they changed so slowly that they cannot be used for dating purposes.

Again, when we do a comparative study within the OT of customs, we see that some of the customs and practices taken for granted by the patriarchs were forbidden by later law, i.e. Abraham married his half-sister (prohibited in Lev 18:9, 11; 20:17), Jacob married 2 sisters (banned in Lev 18:18), Judah and Simeon married Canaanites, Joseph an Egyptian, whereas intermarriages with foreigners fiercely condemned later (Ex 34:16; Dt 7:3), Isaac and Jacob both change the order of seniority of their descendants in making their will (later prohibited by Dt 21:15-17), yet they are patriarchs and considered righteous.

Though circumcision specified in the Abraham narrative, two other observances of great importance to later Jews – Sabbath observance and dietary restrictions – are not mentioned at all in Genesis. Holiness, so important to an understanding of God and His precepts for humanity, is absent from this book and is presented in Ex 3:5 for the first time. This indicates that the traditions in Genesis are old, long before the Mosaic laws were put into place.

Religion of the Patriarchs

We of course only have a sketch of what religious life would have been like during the time of the patriarchs, but there are **certain facts** we can know about their faith.

1. Abraham and his father Terah were polytheists at the time of God's call (Josh 24:2, 14; Gen 31:19-35, 53; 35:2). Abraham left his old religious ways in order to follow God.

2. This same God appeared to each of the patriarchs, chose them, and promised to be with them. Each then chose this God as the family's patron.
3. God sealed the relationship with the one elected through a unilateral covenant (15:7-21).
4. He revealed himself to be a personal God, desiring to associate with humans. Canaanite gods, by contrast, were primarily associated with places.
5. Worship consisted of praying, probably often prostrating themselves in common Near Eastern manner (17:3; 24:52). They built altars and offered sacrifices, but did not worship at a single special location.

Differences from the surrounding cultures

The Patriarchal narrative reveals a single God who makes covenants with human beings, and is present wherever his people go. The surrounding cultures believed in and worshipped multiple gods who made no covenants with humans and were often associated with particular locations.

Names of God. The author wrote centuries after the patriarchs, so he describes their religious practices in terms that made sense to his readers. As an example, though Yahweh as a name for God is not used as a self-designation until Ex 3:13-15 and 6:3, the word Yahweh is used throughout Genesis, but only by the narrator and occasionally by a human, never by God Himself. The patriarchs hear God use the self-designation of El or El-Shaddai (see 17:1). Other names in the Abrahamic narrative for God all begin with "El" – El-Elyon (14:18), El-Roi (16:13), El-Olam (21:33). Hence, we believe that the author of Genesis held that the patriarchs knew God as El-Shaddai and El derivatives, not as Yahweh, but that the author also held that they were the one and same God. El-Shaddai most often is translated "God Almighty" and is may be the oldest name for God in Genesis. This title always occurs in Genesis in connection with the promise of descendants. This is particularly fitting, for even the El of Canaanite deity origin was the only god who can grant children. The name is associated with divine omnipotence, his ability to fulfill his promises and especially to make the barren fertile.

Parallels found among The Patriarchal Narratives

Besides genealogically being linked by blood and portraying a family history of several generations, the patriarchs are also linked by parallels between the plots of each group of stories, which tend to highlight the similarities among them, as well as more loosely with the subsequent history of Israel.

- 1) All leave their homeland at some point
- 2) All quarrel with their brothers (if they have brothers)
- 3) Go down to Egypt, 1 to Gerar, i.e., toward Egypt, due to famine
- 4) 2 wives are seduced or nearly so (Sarah & Rebekah); an Egyptian wife attempts to seduce Joseph
- 5) Wives are barren and quarrel (Abraham & Jacob)
- 6) Younger sons are divinely favored

- 7) Brides met at well (Isaac & Jacob & Moses)
- 8) Promises of children, land, divine blessing
- 9) Gentiles acknowledge Gods' blessing on the patriarch
- 10) All buried in cave at Machpelah, except Rachel

They were hence written to shed light on each other, slight differences from one narrative to another help to enhance the portrait and present the individual character of each person. Example: While Jacob and Moses encounter future brides at a well and negotiate terms of marriage with their future fathers-in-law, Isaac stays home and a servant does the work. This suggests that Isaac is more retiring and less forceful a person, an impression that is confirmed later in his dealings with the Philistines and his manipulation by Rebekah and Jacob.

The Lord retreated further into the background, direct encounters becoming less frequent with each succeeding patriarch, until Joseph only knows of God's will through dreams, not direct contact. But their personalities become more sharply defined as the cycles unroll.

All patriarchal stories contain **the theme of promises**. Descendants, land, and divine blessing are goals to which the stories unfold, though the means to obtain these goals vary. The human response to these promises revolves either around faith or disbelief. Faith in these stories is the capacity to embrace the announced future with such passion that the present can be relinquished for the sake of that future. (Brueggemann 106)

Abrahamic narrative

The trust and **faith** of Abraham is the main claim of this narrative. It is stated at the beginning (12:3), in the middle (15:6) and at the end (22:1-13). But Abraham is not always confident in faith for he is shown in all his humanness. He resorts to deception to save his own life and an alternate wife to help God out in His promises. Abraham's faith is neither easy nor without anguish. (Brueggemann 111) It is truly in a process of growth, he is on a journey, just as we are on our own **faith journeys**.

**** Activity: Lessons from Abraham**

Have each person draw a timeline of their own faith journey chronologically on a piece of paper, listing times of interaction with God, times of fear or disobedience, times of return and important faith-building events. As we move through Abraham's life journey, ask students to be looking for parallels with their own journeys.

It is the **promise of a son** that is central to the Abraham story and his faith, so let us now begin there. There was a desperate desire for children in

primitive society – without whom one had no one to perpetuate his name, one's wife had no prestige since there existed no alternative career to motherhood, in old age there would be no one to care for them and after death, no one to carry out funeral rites regarded as vital to one's soul in the afterlife. This becomes especially poignant in the Abraham stories because they are repeatedly promised a child by God Himself, but there is a great delay in its fulfillment. WHO WILL BE ABRAHAM'S HEIR?

✓ **The Call of Abraham 11:27 – 12:9**

Introduction to the main characters

Abram, Sarai and Lot – genealogy of the patriarchs often headed by mention of the father (here, Terah), while stories focus on the sons. Lot is Terah's grandson and Abraham's nephew. Abram married his half-sister Sarai (different mother but same father, Terah) while Nahor married his niece, Milcah. Leviticus introduces incest rules against marriage of one's half-sister but these were unknown in patriarchal times.

The problem of infertility

11:30 Though we can see the links so clearly through the genealogies from Adam to Abram, we encounter a sudden discontinuity. Though all of creation has been told to be fruitful and multiply, though even evil does not seem to get in the way of God's blessing on creation's fertility, suddenly we are confronted with this family who has nowhere to go, who is hopeless, who has no foreseeable future. Sarai is barren. But here, it is not meant to be a statement of God's judgment on Sarai or of human hopelessness. This becomes the arena for God's life-giving action, not only to this one family, but to the whole human race. This is the ground of the good news – God is not dependent upon any potentiality in the one addressed. He can produce new life from death itself, from a cross and a grave. (Brueggemann 116-7)

12:1-3 The Abrahamic **covenant** begins here. These verses have been explored by many in great depth because they are central to the understanding of the whole of Genesis. Verbal connections with primeval history are numerous in these three verses: land, descendants, nation, name, greatness, curse and blessing, Canaan, and Canaanites.

This section falls into two main parts: divine word vv 1-3 (command 1/promise 2/promise 3) and Abram's response vv 4-9 (journey 4-5/journey 6-7/journey 8-9). Each part begins with the key word "go" and the fulfillment in v. 4 inverts the word order of the command in v. 1: **(write on board)**

The Lord said
 Abram
 "Go"
 he went
 Abram
 The Lord had spoken

This shows how carefully this section has been composed and how important each verse is here. By placing the promises to Abraham right at the beginning of all the patriarchal narratives, the author is asserting their fundamental importance for the history of Israel and the world and gives us the key to how the stories that follow ought to be understood.

v. 1: The account opens with divine speech. Just as God was the subject of the first verb of Gen 1:1, so now God is the subject of a new revelation, a new plan of salvation. (Arnold 71)

v. 2-3: The promise of blessing is central here – “blessing” occurs more frequently in Genesis than any other part of the OT. Blessing is manifested most obviously in human prosperity (long life, wealth, peace, good harvests and children) but the presence of God walking with his people is the highest of all blessings. These blessings are reassertions of God’s original intentions for man. **(write on board)**

God replaced the 3 things abandoned with 3 central promises:

Land	with	a new land
People/clan/family (relatives)	with	descendants/great nation
Father’s house	with	blessing on self and others

True **security** and **fulfillment** in life are achieved by living for God and depending on his promises. (Arnold 73) A departure from society’s securities is the only way out of our human barrenness. To stay in safety is to remain barren; to leave in risk is to have hope. This echoes Jesus’ own words “For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mk 8:35). (Brueggemann 118)

v. 7: “The Lord appeared to Abram” is a theophany (the appearance of a divine being). This is God’s first appearance to a patriarch and His first to anyone in the OT outside of Eden.

v. 5-9: Itinerary takes Abram from the northern to the southern border of the land. He not only sees what has been promised to him, but he walks through it. Symbolically he has taken possession of it. Ending in the south prepares for the next episode, going to Egypt.

√ **Abraham in Egypt 12:10-20**

Why Egypt? Fluctuating rainfall made Canaan susceptible to food shortages until modern irrigation, while Egypt was the standard refuge because Nile provided more certain food supply not dependent upon rainfall.

Abraham/Jacob's sons/Israel itself all go to Egypt because of severe famine that threatened the survival of the family/chosen people. We will see three famines in the patriarchal narratives, first when Abraham is in the Negev, second when Isaac is in the Negev, and the third when Joseph is in Egypt.

v. 11-13: Why does Abram pretend to be Sarai's brother? Abram apparently didn't know the ruse would end with Pharaoh becoming interested in her. What we recognize from the story is the threat to God's promises by Abram's own actions and how his actions impact the affairs of nations.

v.18: "What have you done?" same question with Eve, almost the same with Cain, again same in 20:9 and 26:10 when foreign kings quite shocked by the patriarchs' dishonesty in such a grave matter. Adultery was understood to be a severe crime; throughout ANE it was known as the great sin deserving the death penalty. All three wife-sister stories in Gen (chs 12, 20, 26) have in common that the foreign monarch is more concerned about morality than is the patriarch. Whereas Abram shows no faith in God's protection and only fear for himself, Pharaoh did experience God and recognizes God's protection on Abram and lets him go.

How successful was Abram at being a missionary for God to the other nations in this story? Not very! The pharaoh appears to be more righteous than Abram. To be absorbed into another man's harem, particularly as a foreigner, would have been degrading for Sarai. All of this indicates that Abram was not the perfect hero that later Jewish leaders and scholars wished he were. Josephus called him a sinless saint (Ant. 1.7-13) but he certainly was not that, according to the biblical record.

√ **Abram & Lot separate 13:1-18**

Note whereas Abram reacted out of fear in the previous chapter, here he acts in faith that God's promise of land cannot be thwarted by Lot. As the older uncle, he could have taken the good land for himself. But Abram is willing to trust God that God is the one who will provide the land promised to Abram. So he allows Lot to choose. What a different action taken by Abram here compared to the action he took in Egypt! (Brueggemann 130)

It is the blessing of God on Abram and Lot that creates the problem between them. When Lot chooses to go east, he is moving toward territory that his descendants, the Moabites and Ammonites, would eventually occupy.

Offered a share in Canaan, he is turning his back on it and separating himself from the blessings on Abram. He is not the one through whom Abram would become a great nation. Lot also seems unconcerned about associating with the evil Sodomites since he pitches his tents “near Sodom.” This trait would ultimately get him into trouble in ch. 19. (Arnold 75)

v. 15-17: The promise is again given, much fuller this time. Abram’s generosity to Lot sets a model for his descendants to imitate and will be seen again shortly. The repetition of the promises indicates God’s approval of Abram’s treatment of Lot and that Abram’s descendants would not be through Lot, so the future heir is not Lot.

These two passages (Egypt and Lot) present faith the way it really is – sometimes strong and sometimes not so strong. But in both, the promise-making, blessing-giving God is at work. What matters more than the faith or actions of Abram is the **faithfulness** of God to Abram and to all those who call upon his name. (Brueggemann 134) Do we trust God to use us even though we may be weak on faith and desiring other outcomes than we have been given?

Here in the next chapter we again will encounter Abram coming into contact with others besides his own family: the battle with the kings, and Abram’s contact with Melchizedek.

Abram rescues Lot 14:1-24

This is the only place in Genesis where we have an account of a military campaign with various kings named.

Two main parts – 1) three accounts of battle, and 2) a subsequent interaction among Abraham, the king of Sodom and Melchizedek. This is the first mention of war in the Bible. Four kings lead an invasion of the region, and for 12 yrs the cities of the Dead Sea plain submit to their control, then rebel. A punishment raid is then led by the Eastern kings. As these kings retreat northward, Abram catches them near Dan, defeats them and chases them out of Canaan. Abram’s success reveals his superior military power. 318 fighting men was quite a large group for a single clan but this size fits with the reason for Abram and Lot to have earlier parted company.

What kind of interaction in mission are we seeing here? Conquest! Where else in church history do we see this kind of “missionary” endeavor? Certainly the crusades. This is not exactly the best way to convert someone to your particular God, is it? The fact that he wins, however, does indicate God’s support and this is spoken of by Melchizedek as well. Melchizedek is an example of a non-Jew who recognizes God’s hand at work and God’s blessing on Abram.

v. 16: Spoils of victory belong to the winner and was often a recurrent problem for dispute in ANE.

v. 18: Abram on his return is met near Salem by Melchizedek, the priest and king of Salem (possibly an early name for Jerusalem). His name means something like “king is righteous”. He brought bread and wine, revealing the generosity of Melchizedek since bread and wine is royal fare. Melchizedek combined the offices of king and priest, and is the first priest named in Scripture. Though he refers to god as El-Elyon (this could have been the supreme god of the Canaanite pantheon, El), by v. 22 Abram clearly connects this name with the God of the Hebrews. It appears that Abram may be the only one of the two who knows the true name of God, even if Melchizedek may worship this God. (Brueggemann 137)

v. 19: The first explicit fulfillment of God’s promise concerning blessing- Abram is blessed by Melchizedek, one of the family of men.

v. 20: Tithing was a widespread ANE custom. Given to both sanctuaries and kings, Melchizedek qualifies on both accounts, though probably it is conferred by Abram because of his priesthood and blessing. Abram sets the example for all descendants to follow.

v. 21: The poor attitude of the king of Sodom toward his savior Abram is especially seen in stark contrast to the others’ generosity, and hints at the subsequent doom that is bound to befall those who oppose/have disdain for the elect of God. Abram gives up his own share of booty (which was his due for having been victorious) back to the original owner but does not expect it of the others who helped him in battle. Abram’s generosity is clearly seen, giving this surly king more than his due. Abram’s virtues of courage, loyalty, and piety are shown here, and he seems to regain integrity lost in Egypt.

Melchizedek is indeed a shadowy figure to understand. The link of both king and priest in Melchizedek is further enhanced in Ps 110, which becomes a foundational understanding for Jesus as high priest and king for us. We see the importance of this in Hebrews ch. 7. Not that Jesus is of the lineage of Melchizedek, for he is clearly of the lineage of Judah, but Melchizedek becomes a type for the perfect priesthood of Christ who is not of the Levitical priesthood of Israel. Hebrews specifies why the Levitical priesthood was temporal and temporary compared to the eternal and perfect priesthood of Christ.

√ **Covenant Promise 15:1-21**

We now return back to the issue of offspring. Who is to be the heir? This chapter is foundational to two basic concepts found throughout the Bible: faith and covenant. These truths bind the OT and NT together. (Arnold 92)

v. 2: Divine blessing and reward should lead to a man being fruitful and multiplying. So Abram asks, Why? What am I to do about this? This is Abram's first address directly to God, which reveals the depth of his need and desire for offspring. He questions God that perhaps Eliezer, the head of Abram's household might be the one through whom Abram would have descendants, since it is not through Lot, his nephew. Apparently one could "adopt" someone from outside the family to take care of one during old age and bury the person correctly, then that person would receive the inheritance. But God makes it clear this is not the case either.

Contrasted with each other is the powerful promise in v. 1 and the equally powerful refutation in vv. 2-3. The utter impossibility of the promise to this family becomes evident. Abram knows what is possible and this is not. God then reasserts the promise in no uncertain terms in vv. 4-5. The same God who made the stars without number can also make a son for this barren family. What will be Abram's response?

v. 6: The result: Abram believed! Abram has repented. He has abandoned an understanding of reality that is measured by what he can see and touch and manage. This new orientation to the promise-maker can only take place because of a genuine Genesis – a new beginning only made possible by a creator of beginnings. Faith was Abram's response to God's words to him.

As a result of his faith God designated Abram righteous. One who is righteous is one who has a right relationship with God, is acquitted by God in the day of judgment, who is saved. Righteousness is often portrayed as God-pleasing actions on the part of an individual or nation. Here, faith, the right response to God's revelation, counts as righteousness; that faith leads to righteous action (18:19) as well. Faith involves both believing and obeying; the latter aspect is seen in Heb 11:8-19 and Jms 2:18-24 – these two sides of faith are both needed and are not incompatible with each other. Faith is always lived and acted, if it is real.

This new righteousness means relinquishing (**letting go** of the) control of the present for the sake of a Genesis (a new origin and beginning), for a **commitment** to a God who can do anything. (Brueggemann 146)

v. 7: The covenant between Abram and God foreshadows Yahweh's great salvation for Israel in the exodus from Egypt and covenant at Sinai. Direct linkage of these two covenants is made here in the language of this verse – the Abrahamic and the Mosaic. One is the continuation of the other.

Note: "Chaldeans" is an anachronism, since they were growing in power during the first millennium and were not a people group in the second millennium B.C. Several anachronisms like this are found in Genesis, where the later writer wanted to clarify for his later audience information that might otherwise be confusing.

v. 9: Sacrificial terminology is present (these animals are every type of sacrificial animal used in OT ritual), hence this rite should be interpreted using categories underlying other OT rituals. But this covenant is different than the one at Sinai which imposes obligations on both God and Israel. That one is like ancient international treaties made by great powers with their vassals. Abram's covenant is a promissory oath made by God alone, as only God walks between the animals and invokes their fate on Himself if He fails to keep the covenant. This is a unilateral covenant made by a divine being and is unknown in the rest of the ANE.

v. 12-16: Reveal that the promise will be kept so that God's word need not be doubted, the promise will be delayed for historical reasons, and Abram need not be anxious about the delay. He is assured that it will be passed on to the succeeding generations. Hence, to wait a very long time emerges as an overriding theme of this chapter, whether it is for his own son, or for the fulfillment of the promise of land to his offspring.

This passage is linked to Hab 2:2-4, which describes both the waiting and the fact that the righteous will live by his faith. How difficult is it for us to wait? Sometimes God has a plan that will require our patience and may not be fulfilled in our lifetime, just as Abraham's promises were only partially fulfilled in his.

In a small, poverty-stricken house in London, there lived many years ago a hard-working woman, her back bent from years of standing day after day over a washtub, this being her only source of income. As she worked, she constantly and fervently prayed for her son who later was to run away to sea while only a teenager. With her faith in God, she never gave up hope that her son would one day give his life to the Lord. After she died, her son, who had become a wealthy slave-trader on the high seas, did finally give his life to Christ. He was to bring many thousands of others to Christ as well, for he was John Newton, the one who wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace," his personal testimony of the grace and forgiveness of God. But the story does not end with him, for John Newton's words reached a skeptical man of great learning named Thomas Scott, who had rejected any need for a savior. After conversion, Scott's writings led scores of people to the Lord, including William Cowper. Cowper's poetry and prose in turn touched many for Christ, including one William Wilberforce. Wilberforce went on to work vigilantly for the abolition of slavery as a direct consequence of his faith. Years of persecution and toil on the part of Wilberforce finally resulted in Great Britain outlawing slavery, the first major step among the western nations to end this horrendous practice. Little did John Newton's mother dream that her persistent, lifelong prayers for a wayward son would be used by the Lord to affect all of our lives to this very day. (John Winmill Brown, in Gire 352-3)

How important this passage is to our understanding of God's grace! We cannot earn it by our deeds, but only by our faith. It is this passage that Paul uses in his argument in Romans 4 and Galatians 2-4, that the righteous are to live by faith; it is by faith that one becomes righteous before God.

Birth of Ishmael 16:1-16

A third possibility to the fulfillment of the promise of being a great nation with many descendants now becomes apparent in this episode.

Abraham seems content to wait for God's timing but Sarai is not. She grasps the initiative after 10 years of being settled in Canaan and 77 years of infertility. She is determined and resourceful. Blaming God for her infertility and following long-established ANE custom, she offers her maid Hagar, whose baby would count as Sarai's child. We can tell that the narrator does not endorse Sarai's scheme. There is even a deliberate echo of Gen 3: Abram "obeying his wife," Sarai "taking and giving to her husband".

When Hagar is found to be pregnant, she boldly decides to treat Sarai with contempt. Sarai's status falls into jeopardy because fertile women are always paid more deference than infertile women in the ANE. Abram rather weakly tries to avoid the angry jealousy and infighting between the women by letting Sarai do as she sees fit. Sarai oppresses Hagar to such an extent that Hagar fears for her life and flees. It seems that all parties (Abram, Sarai, Hagar) would have left well enough alone but God reopens the issue and intervenes (v. 7). (Brueggemann 152) This word for oppression in v. 6 is the same one used later of the Egyptian slave masters in Exodus; God's concern for the afflicted Hagar also mirrors his response to Israel suffering in Egypt, when one cries out to the Lord. What the Egyptians would later do to Sarai's children, Sarai did to a child of Egypt, as Hagar is an Egyptian slave. God listened to both. In her moment of greatest distress, Hagar discovers God's concern for her and hence gives the Lord and the well a new name. Even the name of her son (given by the angel) deals with this passage, for Ishmael means "God hears." Hagar responds with obedience to this God and returns to the household. Though excluded from the promise, they are not excluded from the blessing (17:20).

Hasty action springing from unbelief does not forward the divine purpose. Paul in Gal 4 has used imaginative language to describe this Hagar-Ishmael story, but he has seen correctly that they function as an alternative to the promise. The very child who discloses the passion of God for the outsider is no small threat to the insider. He is indeed the temptation we all must face when we try to take the initiative away from God and accomplish what we THINK is what God wants. (Brueggemann 153) When have we tried to second guess God and His plan for our lives?

√ Covenant of Circumcision 17:1-27

This chapter opens with Abram now 99 years old and Sarai, 89. The Lord appears Himself (theophany), signaling a new or important revelation, and declares a new name for Himself – El Shaddai, God Almighty, a name that

emphasizes His invincible power and faithfulness/ability to fulfill His promises.

v. 5, 15: The change of names is significant here. In the Bible they signify an individual's personal character and at times they can reveal a person's destiny. Any midlife name change is a momentous event that symbolizes a change in that person's character or a transformation in their destiny (as here). Amazing that the names are changed by God Himself! Abram = exalted father while Abraham = father of a multitude. Sarai to Sarah constitutes a less clear change since we are not sure about the meaning of Sarai, but Sarah = princess. When someone changes the name of another person in the OT, it indicates an authority over or special knowledge about that other person. (Arnold 97)

Duties imposed on Abraham are slight – circumcision. It is a sign that reminds the Israelite of his special spiritual relationship and of his obligation to walk before God and be perfect. This covenant, if broken by man, will not be terminated; rather the covenant sanctions come into play, that of being cut off. The emphasis on covenant cannot be missed, as the word is used 13 times in this passage.

Abraham immediately obeys "that very day", a term used only here, on the day of the flood, and the day of the exodus.

Only in Europe and Central/East Asia is the custom of circumcision unknown. Usually it was a major rite of passage at puberty, widely practiced by Israel's neighbors. This was only practiced on male offspring, so it is not the same as female circumcision (female genital mutilation) which is nowhere sanctioned by God.

Paul's discussion in Rom 9-11 assumes that God's promises are still valid despite Jewish unbelief, but he goes on to express the spiritual aspect of circumcision, which is also seen in the OT. Rom 2:29, "real circumcision is a matter of the **heart**, spiritual and not literal". The intent of circumcision is to signify commitment to God and acceptance of His covenant. NT replaces circumcision with baptism, which can be practiced by both males and females. Like circumcision, baptism has the potential either as an energizing symbol for faith or a negative alternative to faith when it is practiced only as an act of outward show rather than inward cleansing and commitment. (Brueggemann 156).

✓ **Overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah 18:1-19:38**

No other 24 hour period in Abraham's life is related more fully than this description in Gen 18-19, hinting at the importance of this story for the writer of Genesis. Now Sarah is informed of the birth, indicating that only

Abraham had been informed in 17:19 and he had not passed on the information to Sarah.

Three visitors come their way, and Abraham treats them royally, befitting ANE custom. One visitor is identified as the Lord while the other two are called messengers or angels (v. 1). These strange men have two tasks – one is to promise a beginning. This is done in 18:1-15 with Sarah and Abraham. The second is to carry out an ending. This will be completed in 19:1-28. The awesome task of God is to cause both beginnings and endings. Times of beginnings and endings are times when the mystery of life becomes most urgent and when the hardest theological questions are asked. (Brueggemann 162).

v. 13-14: Sarah finds it difficult to believe and so her laugh. She is not a model of faith at this point, but a model of disbelief. For both of them, the powerful promise of God outdistances their ability to comprehend and receive it. (Brueggemann 158)

Her reaction solicited from the Lord one of the great statements of scripture “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” It is the question that surfaces everywhere in the Bible. We must say it is the fundamental question every person must answer. And how it is answered determines everything else. (Brueggemann 159) When we answer yes, we are refuting God’s power and sovereignty, his ability to impact our lives and change history through Jesus Christ. When we answer no, we are affirming all of this, as well as what that means for our personal walks with the Lord. In the NT, this is the same question asked concerning Elizabeth (Lk 1:37). Mary is presented in contrast to Sarah and Zechariah, as a model for faith and one who does not doubt (1:38). Even Jesus raises the question in the garden of Gethsemane, praying the answer, “Father, all things are possible to thee. Remove this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what thou wilt.” (Mk 14:36)

Abraham then intercedes for the people of Sodom. These are Canaanites, not Israelites, which is important. Can we see a progression in Abraham? At first he was selfish and self-centered around strangers. Then he moves out beyond his own immediate family to defend Lot against aggressors. He gives himself through the tithe to Melchizedek. Now finally he is interceding, not just for Lot, but even for the cities of strangers and those of another religion. A major part of any mission work must be intercession – Jesus himself proved that on the cross, when he interceded for all of us by asking the Father for our forgiveness. This was new territory for Abraham. He knew of God’s intentions to destroy the city, but he was not sure of the limits of God’s mercy. For Lot’s sake and for the others, he was willing to be bold and find out. (Arnold 102)

The actions of Sodom were particularly heinous since homosexual acts between consenting adults were tolerated in most other societies in ANE, but

homosexual rape particularly by a mob was not, so it was bestial to believers and unbelievers alike. The men of Sodom were transgressing universal rules of behavior accepted throughout ANE.

Societies that flout standards of decent human behavior and spurn God's messengers cannot hope to escape divine judgment. Yet even in a society as corrupt as Sodom, the Lord has his own people, a remnant who attempt, however imperfectly, to live by divine standards. We can find solace in Lot being there and being rescued by God, even if we might desire a stronger faith than he exhibited. There was enough decency in Lot's character to try to intervene on the messengers' behalf. Ironically, he would learn that the visitors would have to intervene on his behalf.

The fact that Lot offers his own two virgin daughters to take the place of the men is a difficult passage to explain. Would homosexual attackers not be interested in women? Was Lot hoping his daughters' fiancés would intervene? Was it an act of required hospitality in that culture to protect the visitor above one's own family? Or was this offer reflective of how much the evil practices of his surroundings had come to influence Lot? (Arnold 103)

This story from 18:16 through 19:29 is structured to show the tension between the faith of Abraham and the waywardness of humanity. (Brueggemann 163)

Abraham is portrayed in a wholly positive fashion, the men of Sodom and Gomorrah are portrayed as wholly negative, but the portrait of Lot and his family is more nuanced. Lot is slow to obey the divine command, asking for a closer refuge in Zoar, with his wife and daughters even more attached to Sodom than Lot himself. That Lot survived at all is ascribed to Abraham, for "God remembered Abraham" and sent Lot out of danger. Remember Noah? One family considered righteous is rescued in both stories. Instead of the destruction of the human race, now there is only the destruction of its most evil cities, so the impact of Abraham in this episode is much less than that of Noah. Shaky Lot then falls into sin with his daughters as a result of drinking (like Noah). This final indignity is used to explain the origins of Israel's later enemies, the Moabites and Ammonites. (Arnold 105)

Lessons from this passage

This narrative reveals both the surpassing mercy of God in rescuing undeserving Lot and his anger toward sin in destroying the cities. We also see the necessity of looking deeply at the relationships we have with others around us to ascertain that their influence is not leading us away from God rather than towards Him.

The possibility that innocent people have the capacity to save others and the power to override the destructiveness of guilt and sin is the basis of so much of our intercessory prayer. Lot is not saved by his own righteousness, but

because Abraham has beseeched God. A new righteousness which has power to save is further described in Is 53:5, 10, the capacity to somehow receive guilt into one's own body and rob it of its deathly power and passion. Ultimately this is perfectly carried out in the life of Jesus, for the salvation of all mankind. (Brueggemann 172-4)

What we see, above all else, is that God does not distribute reward and punishment indifferently. He is a God actively seeking a way out of death for us all. Secondly, the virtue and obedience of faithful persons are valued by God and have redemptive potential. God listens to us in our intercessory cries just as He listened to Abraham! (Brueggemann 175)

✓ **Sarah and Abimelek 20:1-18**

The strong and righteous prophet boldly pleading for the salvation of Sodom is now discovered to be less than perfect in his trust of God's safekeeping for a second time. Understandable perhaps the first time with so little experience of God, now it seems amazing that Abraham should fear for his life in a repeat situation. He comes crashing down again, when faced with the need for self-preservation. Abraham's excuses for himself are feeble and unconvincing. While he reports that he acted because Abimelek did not fear God, it is evident that Abimelek did fear God and that Abraham feared many things more than he feared God. (Brueggemann 178) Sounds something like Elijah after calling down fire from heaven, doesn't it? This incident helps us see that Abraham was not such a saint as we might have believed, nor were all the inhabitants of Canaan so depraved as those in Sodom.

But the author is not just attempting to more accurately portray characterizations of previous chapters, he is as always tracing the working out of the promises of Abraham. Though this episode could place the promise of God in jeopardy again, we see God's protection of Sarah and hence the elect **offspring** through an illness imposed upon the king and his retinue so that there would be no question that Isaac is Abraham's child. We see that a nation who **blesses** Abraham and recognizes God at work will also be blessed by Abraham, shown by Abraham's interceding for them so that God healed Abimelek, his wife, and slave-wives. As undeserving as Abraham is, he is still the means by which God grants life and blessing to the nations. The preeminence of Abraham here rests not on Abraham's virtue, but on God's promise. Unworthy as he sometimes is, he is God's chosen way of life to the nations.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS to Abraham: chs 12-19

Lesson 6

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

✓ **Isaac displaces Ishmael 21:1-21**

This chapter begins with laughter, the laughter of joy at the blessing of God in such an unexpected way. "God made me laugh" "everyone who hears it will laugh for me" both words for laugh have the same root word as the root for Isaac's name. The 2nd laugh is the exact word for Isaac. His name means "he laughs".

Here is the most visible and most central of fulfillments of God's promises. Without an heir the other parts of the promise could not be carried out. A three-time repetition of "as He had said" emphasizes the fulfillment of God's promise and the importance theologically of Isaac's birth.

But there is also a mixture of emotions in this brief story – that of faith and doubt, that of joy and jealousy, of love and hatred characterizing the human predicament. At the weaning of Isaac about the time he was 3, it becomes obvious to Ishmael that Isaac is going to survive his childhood, which means his own right of succession is at risk. He reacts by making fun and mocking (same word root, Isaacking) Isaac – a paronomasia. This obviously places his own position in jeopardy because of human reaction to his mocking, but also from the standpoint that "those who disdain you I shall curse." God sanctions the course of action Sarah specifies.

This story does more than just show how Ishmael and Hagar left Abraham's home to become independent nomadic people in fulfillment of God's promise, it shows Abraham's deep affection for Hagar and Ishmael, as well as Hagar's love for her son. Though Ishmael brought the result upon himself, he does pray to God and it is his prayer, not Hagar's, that God answers. She goes on to provide a wife for her son from among her own people, a custom of the household. God is faithful in performing His promises to each person. Although these outsiders are excluded from God's elect line and its promises, they are not excluded from His own promises and blessings. God cares about and for these outsiders. (Brueggemann 184)

Covenant with Abimelek 21:22-34. This story reveals a remarkable confirmation by an outsider of Abraham's position, the blessing associated with Abraham and the affirmation by this outsider of the continued existence of Abraham's family. It appears that this is what Abimelek desires - association with one being blessed by God. A covenant is made, and an oath by Abimelek guarantees Abraham's use of the well. The result is that Abraham obtains his first permanent possession in the Promised Land, a well, in exchange for 7 lambs. The Hebrew word for oath and seven come

from the same root word, so we should not be surprised to learn that the place was called Beer-sheba: Well of the oath or Well of the seven. (Arnold 106)

✓ **Testing of Abraham 22:1-19**

The suspicion we carry with us is that God will ask me to do the thing I least want to do, go to the very last place I desire to go.

Abraham had to face his greatest nightmare as well. What might God call him to that would threaten the deepest need within him? Chapter 22 is the **theological summit of the entire story** of Abraham. No other story in Genesis or even the OT can match this for its haunting beauty or its theological depth.

- 1) Construction of the passage is organized around three series of summons/response statement interchanges: **(Write on board)**

Series 1

Summons by God 1
Abraham's response 1

Series 2

Summons by Isaac 7
Abraham's response 7

Series 3

Summons by angel 11
Abraham's response 11

(Note: All three responses are "Here I am")

God's command 2

Isaac's question 7
Abraham's statement 8

Angel gives release 12

v. 8: This verse is decisive – it is here that the primary disclosure about God, "God will provide", allows the story to move from its problem to its solution. It is the ultimate statement of trust by one who has faith in the One who is faithful to provide. (Brueggemann 187)

The episode begins and ends in Beersheba. The journey to Moriah (believed to be Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock where Mohammed ascended into heaven and then returned to spread Islam) is the consummation of a larger pilgrimage that is Abraham's life, and it is only because he makes this journey that there will be an Israel to continue after him.

The author lets the reader in on a secret – God tested Abraham: is his love for Isaac held above that for God? Abraham is unaware that his trial is a test, for him it is real and heart-breaking. God knows this, for He begins with unusual gentleness, endorsing the fitness of Abraham's love for Isaac, "your son, your only child, whom you love". Ishmael is completely out of this story. It is only through Isaac that Abraham will be a patriarch of a nation and he is fully aware of this. God must test the one thing in his life that is most precious and most vulnerable – his desire for offspring and lasting memorial.

The Three Commands. In v. 2 we encounter the three commands of God that turn Abraham's world around. The first, the verb "Take" has three direct objects, moving from the general to the more particular:

TAKE

Your son
Your only son, whom you love
Isaac

The second imperative is "**Go**". The specific Hebrew spelling of this verb only occurs one other place in the entire OT – Genesis 12:1!! There it is linked as well to a further qualifier repeated here as well: in **12:1** "to a land unknown ("I will show you") Here it is "to a mountain unknown" ("I will tell you"). Clearly we see the author intends this to be a concluding and climactic episode in Abraham's journey of faith, which began in ch. 12.

The third imperative was devastating: **Offer up for a sacrifice...** In Gen 12 Abraham was called to leave his **past**, in Gen 22 Abraham is being called to leave his **future!** (Arnold 107)

Abraham's faith is in God, not just in the promises. Seeing the mountain in the distance and having traveled for three days (v.3) reminds us that his agony was long and drawn out. How prophetic are Abraham's own words, "God will provide Himself a sheep for the burnt offering, my son". It can be taken as an affirmation of faith, a prophecy or as a prayer, but it is clearly a turning point in the narrative. Abraham has made his choice to obey God no matter the outcome. The transformation of Abraham through years of interaction with this faithful God, is about to be fully realized. He is building the altar in order to put on it the promises themselves, embodied in his son. Abraham reveals that his trust is truly in God, not simply in what God promises. He discovers that the promises are his by privilege, not by right. The value resides **in God alone**, not in the promises themselves. Abraham has forsaken his own way in order to rely fully on the way of God. Though he does not understand God's way, he is prepared to act solidly on the word of God. His only refuge is in the divine provider whom he finds unknowable, but reliable and good. (Brueggemann 188)

NT application. But this story is much more than just a statement about replacing an animal sacrifice for human sacrifice. It is about the testing of God and the provisions of God. Jesus, in fact, becomes the one tested in Gethsemane and on the cross, He must choose to believe in God's promise of new life that will come out of death. Testing/provision becomes crucifixion/resurrection in the life of the church. (Brueggemann 194) In NT, James 2:21 and Hebrews 11:17 use Isaac's sacrifice not just to shed light on the atonement of Christ and what He did for us, but to portray the kind of faith and behavior the pious should imitate, a **faith** that is carried out in **action**.

Why God tests faith. True, deep and abiding faith is a decision to submit wholly, completely and unreservedly to a holy God. We Wesleyans call this

kind of faith "entire sanctification." Abraham's temptation is to worship something in place of the living God, be it his own son or the promise of an heir. We look longingly at the temptation to find an alternative that is easier, less demanding than this God who requires our all, our total commitment to Him alone. That is why God tested his faith and why God continues to test ours. Do we trust God for who He is, or for what He gives us? God will stretch us to the limits of our physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual beings in order to expand our capacity to know Him, and in that knowing to discover the vast potential of life lived by faith. (Briscoe 192) Have you been tested in this way? Have you died to your own life that you might know true life in God? Do you believe His promises and trust His goodness so fully, that you have placed everything before Him, so that nothing will be above Him in your life?

Let us take the time to pray now, that God may reveal to us anything that has come between God and ourselves, anything that we need to place on the altar just as Abraham had to place Isaac on the altar of sacrifice.

√ **Genealogy of Rebekah 22:20-24**

The promise in the previous passage of numerous descendants implies that Isaac must marry in order to carry this out. That Rebekah is the only female mentioned among all these men indicates her character and leaves the reader wondering how this will affect the rest of the story.

√ **Purchase of burial ground 23:1-20**

Think about the women in Genesis. From Eve until Sarah none is highlighted, other than to specify her position as wife. Sarah plays a major role in the story of Abraham. She is heroic, and a worthy mother of a nation. Yet she was treated often with apparent contempt by Abraham, offering her life to protect his own, more than once. This story makes plain the fact that he cared deeply for her and wanted to honor her in death at age 127 years. He needed the land to have an undeniable family grave where she might enjoy undisturbed peace. That is probably why he refused to accept land merely given but not bought, for it could be taken back or used as ransom in the future. The importance of the business transaction is stressed by references to this being performed publicly before the elders of the city, as a legal transaction. This was the first clear step towards Abraham and his offspring gaining the Promised Land, so the fact that Hebron is in the land of Canaan is repeated twice. Again, fulfillment of the promises lies behind this story. All of the patriarchs and matriarchs except Rachel will be buried in this cave at Machpelah. At least in death they were heirs and no longer strangers.

√ **Betrothal of Rebekah 24:1-67**

4 scenes in this passage – Abraham and his servant, the servant and Rebekah, the servant and kinsmen of Rebekah, and Isaac and Rebekah.

In his old age, Abraham has his servant take a solemn oath (hand under the thigh) that he will go to the homeland to obtain a wife for Isaac, setting a precedent for future generations to take wives from within the family of God, rather than from among the heathen surrounding them. Abraham declares his faith in the promises made to him and in God's care for his descendants. The fiancée must be willing to come to Canaan or it would represent a repudiation of God's promises and renunciation of Abraham's original charge to leave Haran. At the same time, the fiancée cannot be a Canaanite – too much animosity there. The servant's test in Haran is a sign of the characteristics required in a patriarch's wife, who must be energetic and hospitable. Since a camel can drink up to 25 gallons of water at one time, offering to water his camels was a monumental job of backbreaking labor for a total stranger. Rebekah passes the test with flying colors.

The servant must also use all his persuasion to convince the family to allow Rebekah to go to a foreign land in marriage. Though Bethuel, her father, might be expected the most important person to win over, it is quickly clear to the servant that it is her mother and her brother Laban who will have the final say. Laban is shown to be very concerned for material advantage, so the servant wisely begins his speech by informing them of Abraham's great wealth and Isaac is his heir. After appealing to #1 wealth and Laban's #2 sense of family, the servant finally addresses #3 his piety. Though they agree to the marriage, they are still reluctant to let her go, and it is Rebekah herself who must break the deadlock. She agrees to leave, and in so doing, she behaves like Abraham, who also left home and family from this location to go to the Promised Land. As Abraham of the previous generation ended richly blessed, so Rebekah, mother of the future generation, begins in blessing. The entire family of Abraham is richly blessed. (Brueggemann 199)

The length and detail of this passage indicates its importance and its popularity. Matchmaking can be God's doing; Abraham's offspring should marry within the family and not Canaanites; the ideal servant puts his master's interest first and carries out instructions loyally, dependent upon God, to the best of his ability. The passage also teaches spirituality since the servant prays before he acts, praises when his prayers are answered, and lives ever conscious that the affairs of men are controlled by hand of God. Though the guidance of God is not direct and overt, it is nevertheless recognized and acknowledged. There is conviction that all events are under Yahweh's care, and one is aware of this by his discernment and readiness to trust, rather than by dramatic divine actions. This text nurtures mature faith that resists both easy romanticism and hard cynicism. (Brueggemann 200-2)

✓ **Family History of Ishmael 25:12-18**

The Genesis stories explain the tension present between Israelites and Ishmaelites which have come down through the generations and the centuries to our present day (physically, Arab tribes inhabiting deserts south and east of Israel, but spiritually, the claimants of Islam as descendants of Abraham through Ishmael). But Genesis also proves that God's promises will be carried out (12 princes). Since He did not overlook His promises to Ishmael, God will certainly be faithful to those guaranteed by oath to Abraham about his descendants, the next part of the Genesis story.

✓ **Family History of Isaac 25:19 – end of Ch. 35**

Last but most important, Isaac

25:19-36:1 defines its limits. There are three lengthy sections in the Patriarchal History – Abraham, Jacob (this section) and Joseph. Jacob's sons become the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob's story ends with father Jacob at loggerheads with most of his sons; it is only the Joseph story that describes the healing of the breach within the family. There is the juxtaposition of special designation and a life of conflict that is the mainspring of the narrative. (Brueggemann 205)

There are two ways in which the Jacob story is contrasted with the Abraham story- 1) the Abraham narrative is concerned with the "vertical" problem of a promise from God to Abraham, whereas Jacob struggles within his own generation, with his brother, wives, and uncle. 2) whereas Abraham is concerned with the issue of promise of a son, Jacob's story is dominated with the motif of blessing. We will see this carried out as we study the individual chapters.

Structure (see Student Workbook)

Jacob story clearly exhibits palistrophe:

Jacob cheats Esau of his blessing	A
Jacob meets God at Bethel	B
Jacob arrives at Laban's house	C
Jacob marries 2 because of Laban's Trick	D
Birth of Jacob's sons (esp. Joseph)	E
Jacob tricks Laban	D'
Jacob leaves Laban's house	C'
Jacob meets angel of God at Penuel	B'
Jacob returns Esau's blessing	A'

(Brueggemann 211)

The central scene is the birth of Jacob's sons, especially Joseph, which tells him it is time to go home. We see the same wording as the other major

palistrophe of Genesis – that of Noah. “God remembered Rachel” is used to emphasize that it is God who controls events and saves His people.

✓ **First Encounter of Jacob & Esau 25:19-34**

Rebekah is childless for nearly 20 years. This is a common occurrence for the patriarchal stories – Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel.

The verse “2 nations in your womb . . . the older will be the slave of the younger” **is programmatic for the whole Jacob & Esau story.**

God works a basic reversal of social and cultural rights. He is free to work His will in the face of every human convention. (Brueggemann 214, 16)

Conflict between the two brothers is aggravated by their **parents’ partiality and favoritism** (which will be seen with Jacob and his son Joseph as well).

The younger displaces the older in favor – Isaac & Ishmael, now Jacob & Esau. In this chapter, Jacob acquires the firstborn’s **right of inheritance**, already fulfilling the prophecy that the older will be the slave of the younger. The birthright gave the firstborn twice the inheritance of other sons and the responsibility of being the patriarch after the father’s death.

Historical outcome of enmity

Jacob & Esau are the forefathers of two nations, Israel & Edom, who were bitter rivals throughout OT history. We cannot understand the story of Jacob & Esau without understanding the genetic link to Israel & Edom (show Edom on a map). When Israel was on the exodus and had to go through the wilderness on their way to Canaan, Edom refused to allow them to go through their territory. Throughout the monarchy there was conflict. At the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, Edom sided with the Babylonians against their own relatives and helped cut off those Israelites trying to escape from Babylon. The book of Obadiah was written against Edom. Even the NT looks on Esau negatively, with the book of Hebrews seeing him as a backslider or unbeliever. Worse than that, though, is the fact that Herod the Great is an Idumean (Edomite). The enmity continued, as he kills the Jewish babies in Bethlehem in an attempt to stamp out the line of Jacob; his son Herod is the one to confront Jesus at his crucifixion.

At this point, the narrator is not condemning of Jacob’s actions, but rather judges Esau’s indifference toward his family responsibilities and privileges “So Esau despised his birthright.” (Arnold 120) Though we are shocked that Esau so lightly sells his birthright, Jacob himself is at times thoroughly obnoxious. Far too crafty to be a typical “hero”, he first takes advantage of his brother to give up his birthright, then deceives his own father to give him

the family blessing (which conferred future status and role in the family, whether good or bad), showing himself to be both a liar and a cheat. Jacob has a sharp mind and no conscience; Esau is all belly and no brains. We see in Heb 11:20-21 and 12:15-17 Esau is used to illustrate someone who does not believe the promise, while Jacob is among those who had faith. (Brueggemann 219) Despite all their sinfulness, God's chosen are preserved and blessed. God's saving purpose is not thwarted by human weakness, though it may be delayed by sin and poor choices.

✓ **Isaac and the Philistines 26:1-33**

Isaac spends most of his life in the shadow of other members of his family, as a rather timid character, again seen here in that light. Throughout this narrative, comparisons are being drawn between Isaac and his father, more so here than in any subsequent chapters. There is a famine, but instead of going to Egypt as Abraham did, Isaac is told by God to "to camp in the country which I shall tell you" echoes of 12:1 & 22:2 in Abraham's life. The promises are reiterated and actually outshine those of his father, Isaac sees more of the promise fulfilled than his father did. In fact the promise theme is secondary to the blessing theme, which is very this-worldly in this passage. Isaac is indeed prosperous, powerful, and wealthy. (Brueggemann 222)

Yet Isaac makes the exact same mistake his father did, passing Rebekah off as his sister because of fear for his own life, willing to sacrifice her honor and commit a grave sin in the process. Once again they are saved from their folly by God's grace and the integrity of a foreign king, very concerned for sexual morality.

Now there is a well problem to which Isaac doesn't act, but just reacts passively. It appears the treaty between Abimelek and Abraham has been broken by Abimelek's men. Abimelek may be a subsequent king with the same throne name. (Arnold 120) Yet Isaac doesn't lose faith in God's promise, v.22. Abimelek sues for peace, restores the treaty now with Isaac, and that very day abundant water is discovered. Though his timidity in some situations led Isaac astray, in others it prompted him to be conciliatory (with the wells) where others might have stirred up strife. Instead, there is ever-increasing prosperity. This episode confirms that Isaac is indeed the one to bear God's blessings in the next generation after Abraham. God has indeed made room for Isaac and his people, as the name of one of the wells, Rehoboth attests (v. 22). (Brueggemann 225)

Application questions to Abraham and Jacob: chs. 20-25

THE DECEIT OF JACOB

✓ **Jacob cheats Esau of blessing 26:34 – 28:9**

Jacob and Rebekah seem very plotting and evil in what they are doing, but it is unlikely that the author saw it all so black and white. The episode begins with remarks on Esau marrying two Hittite wives who gave much trouble to Isaac and Rebekah, a bad sign. It may even reflect Isaac's neglect of his duty to his sons since he had not obtained wives for them as Abraham had done for Isaac. Again Isaac is portrayed as passive in this, and avoids confrontation. At his deathbed, he flouts convention and summons ONLY Esau to his side to receive a blessing. It was customary at that time to call all the sons to one's side to receive appropriate blessings, so Isaac is on purpose leaving Jacob out. His reason for only calling Esau is that he makes "a tasty brew that I love" – one is reminded that Esau had swapped his birthright for a tasty stew. Isaac and Esau appear to be both alike in putting appetite before principle, self-indulgence before justice, immediate satisfaction before long term spiritual values. Initially, the blame then lies as much with Isaac and Esau as with Rebekah and Jacob.

We do not know clearly how the author viewed all of this, though Isaac says that "your brother has come with deceit". We do find out subsequently that Jacob and Rebekah suffer for their deeds. Jacob who loved the hearth has to flee his home for 20 years. Rebekah never sees her favorite son again for she dies before his return. Another parallel is striking here, for Jacob never accepts Leah's sons just as he was not accepted by his own father, and like his mother Rebekah, who must have mourned his going, Jacob would spend most of his latter years mourning the loss of his favorite son, Joseph.

Fundamental to the story is the conviction of the efficacy of the deathbed blessing – what the patriarch says before he dies determines the destiny of his descendants, it is a prophecy whose fulfillment is certain. We will certainly see this again when Jacob is on his own deathbed. The power of symbolic actions and spoken words to shape human life cannot be missed in this passage. (Brueggemann 228) The blessing of one generation upon the next is extremely important for those who carry on the family name.

However, the blessing and the birthright belonged together and so to accept and administer the blessing when it no longer applied (in this case to Esau) was a fundamentally dishonest action on the part of both the father and the son. Both realize that they are helpless in changing what they wish they

could but cannot. Both have been dealt a mortal blow. The father knows that things are beyond his power to recall. Every father would want to make it all right for his son, but Isaac can do nothing concrete for Esau. It is too late and the blessing cannot be rescinded. Isaac offers a lesser promise to his beloved child (vv. 39-40), a promise to the nations, if not to the elect of God. (Brueggemann 233-4)

Perhaps even more than ever before, we see the unprincipled behavior by every member of the family, each self-centeredly seeking his or her own interest. Even the mother felt she could humiliate her husband and blatantly manipulate her sons. The narrator is not simply pointing out the fallibility of God's chosen, whose virtues often turn into vices, but reasserting the grace of God. His mercy is the ultimate ground of salvation for the nation of Israel and for all humanity.

Mixed marriages

Isaac sends Jacob off to find a wife from among the family. 27:46 to 28:9 seems almost to be added separately, as the story flows well from 27:45 to 28:10. This section has a clear intention behind it. The acute threat of assimilation by other cultures came to be symbolized by the problem of mixed marriages. The identity and distinctiveness of the Israelite community in the face of such assimilation was important to the beginnings of this community, as well as to its history. This becomes particularly poignant to the community in exile to Babylon, when the mixing with the local culture would have resulted in the end of that community. How this story would speak into that later situation!

It appears that even Esau recognizes the wisdom of his parents, when he decides to choose his next wife from among relatives (28:9), he becomes included among those who honor the prohibition. In the NT, we see Paul addressing this issue with the church of Corinth. Known for its battle with syncretism (the combination of different forms of belief or practice without critical examination of the consequences), Paul does not want to disrupt marriages between believers and unbelievers if the marriages had taken place before conversion to Christianity (1 Cor 7:14-15), but he warns against becoming married to an unbeliever in 2 Cor 6:14-16. We need to be self-conscious and intentional about this, so that we can assess and avoid the dangers of syncretism. "Mixed marriage" is not a racial or ethnic issue in the NT – it is a warning against religious syncretism should we be tempted to marry someone who is not a believer. (Brueggemann 238-9)

✓ Jacob meets God at Bethel 28:10-22

Even though his father did send him off warmly, Jacob must have been frightened and depressed with leaving home. He was the home-loving boy

from the start. He now is a fugitive outside all the protections of conventional meanings and social guarantees. It is in the in-between place where nothing is safe or expected and everything is risky that he encounters God. (Brueggemann 241) There he is assured of protection and that he will return home again, though 20 years would pass before this would take place. Jacob is given a presentation of an alternate future with God. This is like the charge to Abram in 12:1-3 only in the opposite direction: Abram from Haran to Canaan, Jacob from Canaan to Haran. No longer could Jacob live on the strength of his parents' faith – it is time for the God of Abraham and Isaac to become the God of Jacob as well. (Arnold 124)

v. 15: God's promise is addressed to Jacob directly and personally. During this encounter on his first night away from home, God reassures him that "I am with you", a promise first heard here in the Bible but heard by many others to come. It is a promise not needed by those like Isaac who lived their lives without conflict and in relative safety. Jacob faces special dangers and needs God's attentive protection. "I am with you" reveals in divine words what the vision has shown – heaven has come to be on earth. It is the name assigned to Jesus himself – Emmanuel, God with us (Mt. 1:23), and it is the last word to the Matthean church by that same God and Savior, "I am with you always" (28:20).

This first promise is about **presence**. The second promise is about an **action**, "I will keep you," the sense of protection such as we hear in the Psalms. Whereas Cain refused to be the keeper of his brother and Jacob has also become a fugitive from his own brother, Jacob is offered a better keeper – the Lord Himself. (Brueggemann 245-6)

The appearance of God presents a word of promise which demands a decision. Jacob now decides in ways that reshape his existence, for promises are covenantal acts. In response, Jacob makes a vow to God that will reorient his life. God had been committed to Jacob since the original oracle about his birth in ch. 25. Only now is Jacob also bound to God. Hence, his response strikes one as a genuine act of faith, but Jacob is still Jacob. Even in this solemn moment, he still sounds like a bargain-hunter. He still adds an "if" (v. 20). (Brueggemann 248)

We now move into the period in Jacob's life when he is with Laban's family. We will see continued conflict, with and between wives and especially now between Laban and Jacob. The character of Jacob is being slowly developed, and it is precisely in this doubtful character that the promise of God is being fulfilled. (Brueggemann 250-1)

✓ **Jacob arrives at Laban's house 29:1-14**

This episode is one of the happiest in Jacob's story. God's promise of protection is being fulfilled. God's providential guidance to a particular well and particular people at the well is an echo of Gen 24, for Jacob finds his own family there. But whereas Abraham's servant wore his piety on his sleeve, Jacob's faith is unmentioned. This is a betrothal type scene wherein the patriarch journeys to a foreign land, encounters his future bride at a well, and waters the flock (see Moses in Exodus as well as Gen 24).

**** Small Group Activity: Rebekah and Rachel**

Form your small groups in order to do the following: Compare and contrast the two betrothal scenes, the first of Rebekah in ch. 24 with the second one of Rachel ch. 29, according to the directions given in the exercise section. Discuss the results in class.

Similarities include: travel to Haran, a distant land, with both travelers told to return to Promised Land; girl takes care of the animals and brings them to the well where the "betrothal scene" takes place; someone reveals family relationship; girl runs back to tell family; Laban comes out to greet the stranger and invites him home; both girls are willing to marry but need Laban's permission.

Differences include: Isaac did not go himself while Jacob did; servant prays to God repeatedly while Jacob does not; marriage discussed immediately by servant but a month later by Jacob; servant bestows gifts while Jacob has none; Rebekah serves the servant while Jacob serves Rachel; Rebekah leaves home to marry while Rachel is married in Haran.

Important points about personalities in the two stories:

Laban clearly shows preference for wealth and own self-interest; Isaac appears withdrawn, retiring, passive, with someone else choosing his bride; Rebekah is a whirl of hospitality and activity (in 4 verses she is the subject of 11 verbs of action and one of speech) which manifests itself later when she takes the initiative to obtain the family blessing for Jacob; Jacob is forceful, seizing his own fate and taking control, wrestles for what he wants and is emotional, very different from his father.

Though these early events in Haran appear to go smoothly, Jacob is soon to discover that there are many obstacles before him, before he can return to his home in peace.

✓ **Jacob marries Leah and Rachel 29:15-30**

Though a high price for a wife, Jacob is willing to pay with 7 years because of his love for Rachel, but he is deceived by Laban on his wedding night, just as he deceived his own father. Jacob is being given a graduate course in "heel-grabbing" by his own kith and kin. Though Jacob as younger brother displaces his older brother, now the older daughter of Laban displaces the younger daughter as Jacob's first wife. Jacob must work for another 7 years to earn Rachel's hand (though he is given her immediately). There is no trick that will reverse this matter. (Brueggemann 253) Though Jacob has been given the promises of God, he does not escape divine justice, God's discipline of those he loves.

Sadly, he apparently harbors bitter resentment at Laban and at Leah, which will have lasting effects on the next generation. His sons are born in rivalry, envy and dispute. Yet in spite of all of this, God's purposes are advanced. God's promise to Jacob of a multitude of descendants is fulfilled largely through the unloved Leah and her maid Zilpah, through whom 8 of the 12 tribes are traced.

✓ **The birth of Jacob's sons 29:31 – 30:24**

Bigamy and polygamy is not explicitly condemned in the OT, though marrying a sister appears to be forbidden in Lev 18:18. However, Gen 2 records that the Lord only created one wife for Adam, which implies that anyone who takes an extra wife is going beyond what God intended. Furthermore, all the polygamous marriages of Gen turn out to be disasters. This should be an indication of God's displeasure with the practice! This may be an opportunity to discuss polygamy with the students.

Here we have two women, sisters, both craving what the other has – Leah longs for Jacob's love, and Rachel is desperate for children. Though there is no indication that the sisters had problems before the marriages took place, there are plenty of indications that it was a very unhappy situation for both of them afterwards. The 12 tribes of Israel emerge out of the intense wrestling of Rachel and Leah, just as the new name Israel will emerge from the wrestling of Jacob with God in ch. 32. Alienation creeps in between husband and wives, between the two sisters and between the wives and God, so that they speak of him as "God" not the Lord. Only when Rachel finally has her prayers answered at the end of this passage, does she again address God with the more intimate covenantal name of the LORD.

The family uses two devices to overcome the disaster of barrenness, first in Rachel and then in Leah as well. First, there is recourse to handmaidens as surrogate mothers, just as Sarah had used with Abraham. The second is the use of mandrakes. (Brueggemann 254) We are clearly confronted with the antipathy between the sisters in this passage, when Reuben brings his mother mandrakes. This is a perennial Mediterranean plant that bears bluish flowers in winter and yellowish plum-sized fruit in summer. It is presently not known to grow in Mesopotamia, but has been found in Syria in the past. The point of the story, too, is that this is a rare find. It is famed for arousing sexual desire and for helping barren women to conceive. As Rachel had never conceived and Leah had apparently become infertile and was obviously shunned by Jacob, both sisters had reason to value highly this fertility drug. Since Jacob is clearly favoring Rachel over Leah, Leah is prepared to give away these valuable mandrakes for just one night with her husband. It also shows how desperate Rachel is for her own children, even though her maid has already borne children for her.

The intensity of Leah's desire is expressed in her words to Jacob, that she has surely hired him (the Hebrew infinitive absolute indicates very strong language). The word *sacar* "hire" (247) is a key term for the Jacob story. The whole of his relationship with Laban seems reduced to a commercial level, now even his relationship with his wives is up for rent. This anticipates as well the birth of Issachar, whose name is explained in v. 18, based upon this root. *Ish-sacar* – man of hire. Leah is blessed with a son – her wages from God.

Interestingly, this passage sheds light on superstitions as well. Though the women highly prized this supposed aid to barrenness, the real reason for barrenness is here clearly expressed – God's sovereignty over conceiving children, over life itself. The one who receives the mandrakes stays barren for three additional years, while the one who gives them away bears three more children in the meantime. It is the LORD who opens and closes the womb. It is the LORD who is the only cause of new life.

This is indeed a most bitterly divided family. Fathered by a lying trickster and mothered by a sharp-tongued shrew, with hatred and envy rampant in the household, the 12 patriarchs grew up to be less than perfect themselves. But the promises took a great step forward in their fulfillment, showing that it is divine grace not human merit that gives mankind its hope for salvation.

✓ **Jacob outwits Laban 30:25 – 31:1**

The stress of the entire narrative of 29-30 is the movement from barrenness to conception and birth. It does not finally come about by human striving but

by the inexplicable remembering and hearing of God (30:22). It is the same remembering that turned the flood for Noah and that salvaged Lot from destruction. It has brought children to Leah (29:33, 30:17). Now finally it is God's remembering of Rachel that results in the birth of Joseph. God is finally named Lord (v. 24) by this woman who has felt abandoned. (Brueggemann 255)

When Joseph is finally born (the turning point in this story), Jacob's yearning for home is reawakened. The positive purpose of this sojourn in Paddan-Aram is now fulfilled. But his father-in-law is not ready to let his economic God-send depart so quickly, if at all. Having served Laban for 14 years to earn both wives, Laban owed Jacob nothing other than his wives, even though Laban's wealth is largely a result of Jacob's hard work and the blessing of God because of Jacob's presence there.

So they work out a deal that Laban believes will keep Jacob with him for a long time to come, if not for the rest of his life (Laban's deceit again). Since goats are usually all black and sheep are all white, Jacob's asking for the "spotted and speckled" animals seems safe enough a request for Laban. He hedges his bet further by going out himself and separating any with spots and speckles presently in the herds, and moving them to a safe distance so that they are not part of the gene pool. Lo and behold, through careful breeding techniques (emphasizing the strong animals only) and a strange procedure that Jacob later attributes to God's inspiration, Jacob indeed is able to breed large herds of the spotted and speckled animals. As Laban sees this happening, he keeps changing which ones Jacob is allowed to keep, only to find that those are the very ones which again prosper and multiply. Though this story reveals a trickster being finally avenged for his tricks, it also shows the promises of God being amply fulfilled.

It is the land, though, that is the dynamic behind this passage, since it is Jacob's desire to return to his land that prompted this entire sequence of events and it is now the land to which God calls Jacob to return. The lessons are plenty in this single passage – that God is not frustrated by the cheat, that justice will finally be done, and that God's promises to His people, here personified in Jacob but meant for all of Israel as well, of land, protection, and blessing to the nations will, despite all opposition, eventually triumph.

✓ **Jacob leaves Laban 31:2 – 32:3**

It is obvious by this time that Laban is unwilling to ever let Jacob and his daughters leave. So with his herds built up and the voice of God ringing in his ears, Jacob finally decides it is time to act. He chooses the busiest time in the herdsman's calendar to leave, sheep-shearing, when all Laban's men

would be working hard from dawn to dusk. This gives him a few days' lead. When Laban finally catches up to him, the Lord has intervened to the point that Laban knows he can not prevent Jacob from moving on, though Laban's force could certainly have wiped Jacob out. Where have we seen previously God's intervention rescuing two other patriarchs from their own misadventures and follies? The covenant becomes a face-saving measure for Laban, for Jacob has no intention to ever return to Laban's territory nor does Laban intend to go to Canaan. It forces Laban to treat Jacob as an equal, something he has not done the 20 years he has forced Jacob to remain with him. But it does protect the marital rights of his daughters. The story again reveals how God has protected Jacob all along the way. It also points to the importance of a focus on God whenever reconciliation is sought - v. 53.

A side issue arises concerning the household gods (31:30-5). We can see that Rachel can deceive as well! What meaning did they have here? Images of deities were sometimes thought to protect the family, as well as divining the will of the gods and for predicting the future. They may also have been associated at this time with the rights of inheritance, though this is not as clear. They certainly were considered sources of protection and blessing. They appeared to be important to Laban and may have continued to be a problem to Jacob until he purged them from his family before continuing on to Bethel (35:2). (Arnold 128) What we also recognize in this passage is that it is the God of Jacob who orders and transforms the affairs of history. The household gods of Laban do nothing, in fact they must be carried about by people, and protected by a menstruating woman – a cultural affront to any gods as a menstruating woman was considered ritually impure and forbidden to come into contact with the gods. The fortunes of Jacob's family depend upon no such lifeless images, but upon the power and presence of the true God of Abraham and Isaac. (Brueggemann 259) In America, Christians may depend upon wealth and position rather than on God to protect them and bring them a sense of security. What kinds of lifeless images are carried around by Africans? Are ancestors and their worship such a burden? If we have divided loyalties, how does that diminish the power of Christ in our lives? (Note what Paul says in Col 2:8-15.)

✓ **Jacob returns Esau's blessing 32:3 – 33:20**

With the assurance from Laban, Jacob makes the first contact with his brother in 32:3-8. Jacob has wrestled with Laban and now faces the possibility of a struggle with Esau, with whom Jacob must come to terms, who he has not seen these 20 years and assumes still wishes to kill him after all this time. But first he will have to struggle with God.

In this chapter we see two sides of Jacob as he plans – prays – plans. Confession before God in prayer and recognition that his blessings are all from God is one side of Jacob. His plans reveal his other side: shrewd, calculating and cautious, trying to cope with relationships by manipulation and barter. He approaches the meeting with Esau with extreme deference, the kind of deference appropriate to a wrong-doer in the face of the offended. It is no doubt a measure of his fear. Because of his shrewdness Jacob can plan. Because of his vulnerability, Jacob must pray. (Brueggemann 263)

His lengthy prayer can be heard in one imperative word: deliver (v. 11). (Brueggemann 264-5) But he does not yet know if his prayer will be answered positively. His anxiety is hinted at, in vv. 23-24, when he rose that night, and forced the extraordinary undertaking of crossing a river at night with women and children. He must press on to meet his brother but he will do so with everyone else going first.

Then the unexpected happens. He is alone struggling with a stranger. We are kept in the dark as much as he is, as to the stranger and the purpose of the struggle. He seems to be winning until his hip socket is dislocated, but he is even then determined to fight on, even when the stranger asks to be released. Quick to take advantage of this request, Jacob asks for a blessing. Throughout his career, Jacob has been determined to acquire blessing by fair means or foul – he has deprived his brother Esau of both birthright and blessing. Now on the eve of his first meeting with Esau since that fateful episode, Jacob is portrayed as still anxious to acquire blessing. Is this because his father Isaac had so clearly not given him blessings during his lifetime and had planned not to bless him even in his death? We often seek during our adult lives for those things we did not receive as children from our parents.

Jacob is renamed Israel “God fights” or “God rules”. Names throughout scripture are significant but changes of name in midlife are especially so (Abraham and Sarah). Jacob is no longer to be the heel grabber. Here Jacob’s new name is to become the name for a nation, so it is full of significance. Jacob’s experience of wrestling with God and yet surviving is seen in later times as prefiguring the national experience. Just as with Jacob, the nation’s trials are seen as heaven-sent, yet only from heaven can they look for deliverance. The nation’s strivings and wrestlings with their God would be evidence of their imagined self-sufficiency and arrogant waywardness which would end in chaos and finally exile. (Briscoe 274). Israel, like Jacob, will continue to struggle with God in order to see who is truly in control.

Jacob’s demanding pushiness turns to sudden awe as he realizes with whom he has been struggling. He suddenly realizes that his wrestling was puny and

powerless compared to the true but here veiled nature of God's power. He finds the blessing he was seeking in the new name he is given by God, for God has graciously allowed him to live. He has prevailed with God, but only because God has allowed it. His prevailing is a defeat as well as a victory, for he is permanently wounded in the process. There is a dangerous costly mystery in drawing near to God. There is **weakness in power and power in weakness**. The same dialectic stands behind Jesus and his disciples. They want thrones but Jesus counters by asking them about cups, baptisms, and crosses (Mk 10:35-40). Like Jacob they are invited to be persons of faith who prevail, but do so with a limp. (Brueggemann 271)

As Jacob approaches Esau, his encounter with God has prepared him for this meeting. Courage replaces cowardice as Jacob strides ahead of his family to meet Esau; humility replaces arrogance, as he bows 7 times, and penitence prompts his attempt to give back the blessing out of which he had cheated Esau (v. 11). No longer grabbing at the heels of blessing himself, he can now offer it freely to another. These are all aspects necessary for true repentance and reconciliation. But he does not entirely trust Esau's warmth – suspicions still linger. He chooses not to accept Esau's "kind" offer to accompany Jacob or send his men with Jacob, nor does Jacob go to Seir (Edom) where Esau lives, apparently out of fear of Esau's men as well as his desire to return to Canaan at God's prompting. Reconciliations are seldom as clear as we anticipate.

Sibling/Familial relationships – whenever siblings in Scripture decide to turn their sibling frustration over to God, as Jacob does, God gives them the strength to deal with their brothers and sisters on a new plane. Whenever they refuse to allow God into the equation, the sibling conflict can remain unresolved and tragedy often results. Cain and Abel are a perfect example. The necessity of God being involved in the process of conflict resolution is obvious in Scripture – reconciliation cannot occur on an horizontal plane until it first occurs on the vertical plane with God. Jacob and Esau work out their disagreements through a covenant before God, just as did Jacob and Laban.

<i>Application Questions to Jacob chs. 26-33</i>
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THE NEXT GENERATION

✓ **Dinah and the Hivites 34:1-31**

Mixed motives are prevalent in this passage, to the extent it is difficult to condemn any of the actors absolutely or to exonerate them entirely. Dinah going out to visit the girls of the region seems harmless enough, but this is considered in the world of ANE a little less than proper, particularly with the biblical emphasis on not intermixing with others. Her motives may have been suspect.

Shechem was wrong to rape her. This would have been punished at least by a payment of large damages or forced marriage according to OT law. But he acts properly after the event and does indeed want to marry her. Jacob appears to be cold towards his six sons and daughter (Dinah) birthed by Leah, so he takes no action about her rape or abduction at all. What a difference when compared to Joseph being abducted later! Jacob could benefit greatly from the alliance – residing in the land, gaining property and improved status as a resident alien (v.10). The Hivites appear to be obliging and reasonable men when they go to talk to the family, though we realize that is not the whole truth since they still hold Dinah almost as a hostage and apparently are hoping to profit financially from the arrangement (v. 23).

The rape of Dinah finally leads to war against the Schemenites and Jacob is dismayed, but again it is not because of what his sons have done or about the rape, but because of the danger to himself as a result. It is his two sons who retort in fierce moral tones. Jacob's old nature reasserts itself, with his moral principles weak, who is fearful of standing up for right when it may cost him, who doubts the power of God to protect him, and who allows hatred to divide him from his children. He has failed to protect his womenfolk because of fear for his own skin (sound familiar? both previous patriarchs did the same). In fact, God uses this event to further fulfill his promise of enrichment, through the seizure of the Shechemite flocks, wives and properties. Dinah's brothers seem to be the heroes of this story (though later the villains in Joseph's story), particularly Simeon and Levi. They seem to fiercely oppose intermarriage with Canaanites. Dinah's brothers of course have quite different intentions than they ever admit. Though they rightly reject Canaanite marriage, they do so for the wrong reasons and with the wrong tactics. The reason is family honor and material gain, not purity of blood lines or the divine promise. Their goal is cold-blooded revenge and their tactic is deception, following in the footsteps of their father. They pretend to be peaceful in order to wage war.

The most holy of symbols for the Jews, circumcision, has been devalued of any religious significance in this story. Certainly it had no deep meaning for the Schechemites, but the Jews themselves do not esteem it for its symbolism. Instead of uniting people around a common belief and a single God, it is used to bring about a people's destruction. It has become a tool of inhumanity, a means to an ignoble end, in which the brothers keep the proceeds of their ill-gotten gain. They did not destroy the booty in an act of faithfulness, but instead turn the event into an act of confiscation for self gain. (Brueggemann 278)

As a result, Jacob is made a stench to the neighbors, just when he has arrived back in the land that he has desired for 20 years. He is rejected by those in the land as a result of his sons' foolish action. At the end of the narrative it appears that Jacob's sons have learned nothing and conceded nothing (v. 31). The sons seem to be blind to the larger issues, just as Jacob seems to be blind to his own familial coldness and disregard. (Brueggemann 279)

Missions in our own land. The land in which we live always comes with people who have another vision and another worldview. They must be dealt with, whether passionately or pragmatically, feebly or faithfully. Do we attack and destroy our enemies, as Jacob's sons did here and as previous generations of Christians have occasionally done? Do we compromise with the culture as perhaps Dinah and even Jacob did here, in order to fit in and not cause a disturbance? Do we withdraw from the culture, isolating ourselves so that we do not have to interact with it at all? Or do we seek to transform the surrounding culture as Christ transforms each of us? What is a Christian response to the culture around us?

✓ **Journey's end for Jacob and Isaac 35:1-29**

This chapter may seem anticlimactic, but there is theological depth here as well. Jacob is now told by God to return to Bethel, where he had met God before. It was there that he had vowed to worship the Lord when he returned to Canaan and if he had returned there the family might have avoided the rape of Dinah altogether. Jacob had not fulfilled that vow yet, so God tells him to go on pilgrimage to the town that was holy to him. This time, without hesitation he complies. Encountering God demands purity in the worshiper and the whole family is defiled by both the rape and the massacre, so he gives directions to them to be purified. Ritual activity – removal of foreign gods from among them, purification, and change of garments – was effective in disengagement from their power. The new community is found by renunciation, renaming, reclothing, and finally, by receiving a promise. (Brueggemann 281-3)

Prompt obedience is promptly rewarded, so a divine terror fell on the towns so that Jacob proceeded to Bethel unmolested, even though they could have faced revenge for the Shechem massacre. This risky journey made at God's command and taken on faith seems to be a test for him, which he survives and, like Abraham, subsequently receives a powerful reaffirmation of the promises, a revelation that would uphold him to his dying day – 48:3-4. Jacob's **departure**

from and **return** to **Bethel provide structural pillars for Jacob's story** – the return is the consummation (**fulfillment**) of his original encounter with God at Bethel. The promises are now pronounced on Israel who is a very different person than who he was when last at Bethel. He is no longer scoundrel and runaway, but now penitent pilgrim. Now Jacob has fulfilled his vow to God.

But as ever in the Pentateuch, the fulfillment is only partial and sorrow soon follows joy. When Rachel's prayer for another son is answered, she dies, naming him "son of sorrow". Jacob more optimistically calls him "son of right" or "son of good fortune".

Even worse is to come, for Reuben lies with his father's concubine in complete contempt of his father. Though the sons of Leah had protested their sister's rape as being a disgrace, Jacob's firstborn commits an even more shameful deed against Israel himself. Not just an issue of sexual morality but also a political issue, it is an attempt to seize power, claim the leadership, and in fact, announce that the old man is dead. Reuben is yielding completely to the cultural forms of Canaanite culture, while two other brothers (Simeon and Levi) resist the culture by attempting to destroy it (ch. 34). (Brueggemann 284)

Jacob hears of the atrocity but does not act immediately. He does not forget what Reuben did, however. His final testament to each son harkens back to this event. The ramifications carry forward until Reuben's lineage is removed from its prominence as first-born – see 1 Chron 5:1,2. Ephraim's lineage takes the place of Reuben as the leader of the 12 tribes. In fact, Joseph's lineage is promoted to the firstborn prominence, when later Jacob blesses both of Joseph's sons by adopting them, thus ensuring a double inheritance to go to Joseph's line, the usual privilege of the firstborn child.

✓ **Family history of Esau 36:1-43**

As is customary with the subordinate non-elect line in Genesis, Esau's family is given before Jacob's and is much briefer. He has married Canaanite women and, like Lot and Ishmael before him, he leaves the land of promise as well. Both Ishmael and Esau are viewed without malice at this point as relatives who walked out of the line of promise by walking away from the land of promise. Esau too has been blessed by God and becomes the father of a multitude.

✓ **Family history of Jacob (37:1) Chapters 37-50**

Joseph's Story 37 – 50

This is actually entitled the family history of Jacob, so the author is interested in all the sons of Jacob, not only Joseph. We should not be surprised that information is included about Judah in particular, since Judah and Joseph's

tribes are destined to have preeminence in the south and the north respectively in the history of the Israelites.

What is different about the Joseph narrative?

- 1) Masterful story that is almost a complete unit in itself.
- 2) Miraculous and supernatural elements not obviously present and God does not appear before Joseph to communicate with him through speech as He did with the other patriarchs.
- 3) No longer dealing with official patriarchs of Israel (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). Why is Joseph not considered a patriarch? Probably because his descendants are only one of the 12 tribes since he is only one of the 12 sons. The official patriarchs of Israel are the fathers of the entire nation, not just one part of it.
- 4) Use of dreams for revelation is a different form of divine communication – again, not direct speech of God but an indirect message. (Arnold 144-5)

Why is the Joseph narrative included at all?

- 1) It explains how Jacob's family came to live in Egypt, leaving the Promised Land. This then is a direct link to Exodus.
- 2) Joseph is presented as an example of holiness and faithfulness for all believers.
- 3) It contributes to the themes of this book and the Pentateuch – including the patriarchal promises. All the families of the earth begin to find blessing, especially as many escape starvation because of Joseph's wise preparation for the famine. But there is one respect that this story is a setback for the promises – the family has to move from Canaan, the Promised Land.

Unique themes. The **dreams** function in the Joseph narrative as the oracle of 25:23 does for the Jacob materials, setting the stage for the entire story. The story is concerned that the family and the empire should "bow down." Seen in this way, the dream stretches to 50:18 when the brothers bow down fully and willingly before Joseph. **God's leadership and guiding power (providence)** is the real subject of this narrative, and is portrayed quite differently than the rest of the patriarchal narratives. (Brueggemann 290) It reveals God's hidden and decisive power to work in and through, and also against human forms of power. As this divine overruling is one theme of this story, **human responsibility** is the counterpoint: the terrible effects of sin, Jacob's favoritism, sibling rivalries, hatred that blights the life of a family for over 20 years until repentance finally brings reconciliation and a new life together.

√ **Joseph sold into Egypt 37:2-36**

This story opens with two increases in tension:

- 1) Joseph's indiscretion about his brothers – the words "evil report" is only used elsewhere to describe the evil report of the 10 spies in the wilderness (Num

12:20), which hints that it may not have been an honest report Joseph gave, but we do not know directly. He is apparently a tattletale (talebearer/informer). 2) Jacob's obvious partiality & favoritism (37:3). One would think that Jacob would have learned favoritism can be fatal to family harmony, but apparently he has not. Joseph's dreams recounted to those who are already offended only inflame the issues further. No wisdom on the part of Joseph there!

The author makes it very clear that the dreams inflame the brothers by using a pun on Joseph's name, which is based on the word "**the one added on**". The other brothers' response when Joseph shares his dreams is twice (v. 5, 8) to "add more hatred upon him", using the verb of the same word as his name (a paranomasia). We see a recurring phrase "**they hated him**" in vv. 4,5,8, then "were jealous of him" in v. 11. The brothers resist and soon reject the dream and the inversion of family relationships which it implies. Jacob chides the dreamer, identifies with the brothers in their resistance, and regards the dream as absurd, but it is indicated in v. 11 that he does not think that such inversions are altogether foolish. He knows that he himself is a consequence of such an inversion and has lived it out in his own life. (Brueggemann 303)

When Joseph is sent to find his brothers, he discovers that they have moved even further away to Dothan, completely beyond the range of their father's control. Though Jacob seems oblivious to the tensions within the family, the author makes it clear to the readers that danger is present, so that we suspect foul play will soon follow.

When it does take place, the brothers may have thought that they have succeeded in removing the hated Joseph from their sight and have killed the dream, but Jacob's mourning will remind them continuously of where his deepest affections lie. Deception upon deception must take place, for the blood will not be covered and the guilt will not vanish. Resistance to the dream requires endless deception, for Jacob will continue for years in his mourning and the brothers will be constantly reminded of what they have done. (Brueggemann 304) Note which brothers are named and what is said about them – Reuben is protector, Judah instigator, Jacob irreconcilable. The scene shows great sympathy for Jacob and Joseph but hints that both partly deserved what happened to them. Yet ultimately the dreams indicate that God's purposes will somehow be carried out.

✓ **Tamar and Judah 38:1-30**

Why is this chapter here? There actually are quite a few reasons for its position and its information.

- 1) It creates suspense for the Joseph cycle, as we wonder what has happened to Joseph after being enslaved.
- 2) It serves to show that Joseph was separated from his family for a long time, Jacob's grandsons grow up in the meantime and marry.

- 3) It furthers the concept of divine justice – as Jacob had deceived his father Isaac, he is deceived by his son Judah concerning Joseph, and now Judah himself is deceived by his daughter-in-law. In all three episodes, goats and items of dress are part of the deception and the story. It shows that injustice will be righted and that the perpetrator will admit his errors, as Judah does here. His brothers will one day admit the same before Joseph. **(Write on board)**

Goats

Jacob deceives Isaac: skin on arms

Sons deceive Jacob: blood on coat

Judah deceives: Tamar's payment

Articles of clothing

Jacob wore Esau's clothing

Joseph's coat

Judah's ring, cord, & staff

- 4) God's preference for the younger child (a major fixture in the Joseph narrative since the older sons will all bow down to him) is revealed again with the twins being born to Tamar. It is through Perez (not Zerah) as the second born that the line of David will come (David is again the youngest in Jesse's family).
- 5) It contrasts Jacob's inconsolable grief over the death of Joseph and the apparent absence of mourning on the part of Judah when two of his sons die. Judah seems to be hard and calloused, suggesting that Joseph be sold into slavery. He orders his daughter-in-law to be burned without even seeing her. But there is a beginning of acceptance of culpability and responsibility for his own actions when he finally admits that "she is in the right, not I". By the end of the Joseph cycle, Judah appeals for Benjamin's release with heartfelt devotion and offers himself as a slave in place of Benjamin. He is a changed man indeed, something that we see in many of these biographical sketches in Genesis. Joseph is not the only one to mature in faith and wisdom! It would be difficult to understand such an about-face on the part of Judah later in the story (ch 44) if we had not seen its beginning here in this chapter.
- 6) Chs 37-50 is the story of Jacob's family, not Joseph, so we should not be surprised that Judah appears here, especially because of the importance of his lineage in the future (the kings).

The central problem of ch 38 is childlessness. The first husband dies because of sin and Onan dies because he refuses to procreate, an affront to God in general and his promises for this particular family. Tamar has not sinned so she has a right to expect to marry the next son. But Jacob does not pursue the continuation of his family line through Shelah even though custom dictated he give him to her (later, it is required – see Dt 25:5-10 in order to protect widows when there is no welfare system). The term "Levirate" marriage comes from the Latin "levir" which translates the Hebrew word for "brother-in-law". The purpose of marrying a widow was to guarantee the childless woman would have children who would receive the deceased family member's name and inheritance. They would also care for the woman in her old age. (Arnold 150)

When Judah's faithlessness to Tamar becomes evident, Tamar has no legal redress as a widow. So she takes the situation into her own hands. Such an incestuous relationship was banned by Leviticus but again shows the different standards of the patriarchal time vs. later. But even in the patriarchal time, infidelity during betrothal counted as adultery (though the betrothal was not going to be consummated if Judah had any say in it), and therefore merited the death penalty. Clearly, Judah is judging Tamar's adulterous actions by a norm very different from the one he applies to himself, since he has been adulterous himself, though he knew not with whom. In v. 24 Judah speaks the old righteousness of double standards and conventional morality. Since the infidelity concerned Judah himself, he actually was declaring the death penalty on himself as well, without knowing it. It is in v. 25-26 that his concession constitutes the main turn in the narrative. "She is more righteous than I" is Judah's recognition of a new radical perception of righteousness. He admits his guilt in the situation. Because of his security and status, he is expected to care in more responsible ways than he has – to risk his son for the future of the community and to treat the defenseless widow with respect. Jesus too offers a dangerous criticism of the old righteousness which sanctioned oppression in the name of propriety. (Brueggemann 311)

Tamar is determined to propagate the descendants of Abraham. That she is a Canaanite woman makes it even more remarkable for this determination, and she places herself as a forerunner of Ruth spiritually, as well as an ancestor of Ruth's husband Boaz. There is no condemnation here of Tamar's actions. She is honored in the genealogy of Jesus at Mt 1:3. So this story which seems so marginal to biblical history, records a vital link in salvation history, both for the OT through David and the NT through Jesus Himself. Tamar, through her determination to have children, secured for Judah the honor of fathering both David and the Savior of the world!

✓ **Joseph's rise to rule over the empire Chs. 39-41**

Joseph and Potiphar 39:1-20

The next three chapters deal with Joseph's rise to come to rule over the empire, his prospering with Potiphar, in prison, and with Pharaoh's dreams.

Joseph's first years in Egypt reveal God's protection and blessing, as he lands in the household of a high-ranking royal official. God may not speak to Joseph directly or miraculously intervene, but He is clearly there through blessing, guidance, and protection. God's presence with Joseph is even evident to Potiphar. The problems with his wife are not there to applaud male propriety over female infidelity, since the previous story had just revealed the reverse. It is to develop the character of Joseph, previously shown to be impetuous and not very wise at all. Whereas Judah is unfaithful in sexual and familial relationships, Joseph shows great integrity. Now he is portrayed as a model, the

wise man who fears God, who is totally loyal and dependable, and is not seduced by the lips of a loose woman (Prov 5:3).

Similarly his unfair dismissal and imprisonment may be seen as typical of the sufferings the righteous often must endure. Joseph's faithfulness to God and loyalty to his employer result in both his advancement in the household but then also in his disgrace and imprisonment. His present disgrace is a necessary preliminary to his future glory, for he would never have met the Pharaoh's cupbearer if he had not been present in the prison.

A question arises: will Joseph remain a Hebrew true to the chosen people, will he become one of many resident aliens in Egypt, or will he become fully an Egyptian?

Joseph in Prison 39:21-40:23

We catch glimpses of Joseph's state of mind here. He appears sympathetic to his fellow prisoners, he was a man of prayer since the Lord was with him and he knew to whom to go for dream interpretation, yet he is frustrated by the unfair imprisonment and God's apparent lack of answer to his prayers for release. His experience of painful, apparently fruitless waiting is typical of that of the patriarchs' looking for children and of numerous others who have cried out to God during periods of desolation. Joseph's experience may be taken as a paradigm for all disciples. The liberator of the butler is himself dependent and in need of liberation. (Brueggemann 325) This chapter is nicely bound with two dreams, two interpretations, and two fulfillments (one symbolic and one literal of "lifting up the head"). Joseph is presented as the conduit, the way of movement from dream to fulfillment. (Brueggemann 321)

The two dreams of Pharaoh's workers remind us of Joseph's two dreams. When will they finally be fulfilled? They set the stage for Pharaoh's own two dreams as well. Dreams serve two functions in this story – 1) they foretell and prepare the way for Joseph's rise to influence. 2) they actually become the means by which the earlier dreams are fulfilled. (Arnold 152)

Application Questions: Chapters 34-40

A TURN OF EVENTS

✓ **Joseph in the palace 41:1-57**

Joseph the forgotten one is now remembered, just at the right time. Thirteen years of imprisonment and slavery, yet Joseph's character has undergone a remarkable transformation. No longer the brash teenager, he is now intelligent and wise, without peer in Egypt. "The vale of tears has proved to be the valley of soul making." Through it all, this story describes God's control of human affairs, which is readily apparent to Joseph as well. He gives credit to God several times as he talks with the greatest man in Egypt. He clearly takes no credit for himself in his ability to interpret dreams (v. 16). The double mention of God in v.32 emphasizes the divine origin of the dream, of its interpretation and of what will take place. The double dreams of Pharaoh are a sign of their certainty and of God's fulfillment – this is a reminder to the reader of Joseph's own double dreams waiting to be fulfilled. (All the dreams come in twos.) The prophet is also a politician, as he gives his own advice on the disaster to come revealed by God.

Joseph's interpretation was at one and the same time a refutation of Pharaoh and his worldview and an undeniable confirmation of God. In Egypt Pharaoh was accepted as a divine being who could influence other deities through the use of magic in order to ensure the cycle of life as the Egyptians enjoyed it. The Nile River and resultant crops were expressions of the imperial power of fertility, and permits the Pharaoh to generate and guarantee life. The failure of the Nile and its life system means that the empire does not have in itself the power of life. Joseph presented Pharaoh with an alternative view – God alone is divine and sovereign. (Arnold 154) Hence, Joseph's monopoly of dream interpretation, of discerning the irresistible future, is subversive for the empire for not even Pharaoh's best and brightest men could do the same (see Dan 2,5 and Exodus 7-8). These dreams claim that only God knows the future and only God decides the future. (Brueggemann 323, 327)

<p>The names of Joseph's two sons. Manasseh "God has made me forget" (v. 51) means that the old life of persecution and misery has been put behind, and affirms discontinuity of Joseph from the troubled history of Jacob. Second name: Ephraim "fruitful" (v. 52) serves to contrast Joseph, the bearer of promise and life, with the fruitless, hopeless reality of the empire. It contrasts this family of blessing with the empire's apparent curse – the fruitful one has life even in the kingdom of affliction. Joseph is a blessing to the nations, as well as harking back to the call to fruitfulness of the pre-historic ancestors.</p>
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A question haunts us: Joseph has spent almost half of his life in Egypt (30 years old now), wears the signet ring of Pharaoh, has been given a new Egyptian name by Pharaoh ("God speaks, he lives"), marries an Egyptian daughter, Asenath, of an Egyptian priest, names his first son "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household". The intent of Pharaoh is to enclose Joseph thoroughly in an Egyptian reality. Up to now, the narrative provides a delicate blend of fidelity and enculturation, of faith and down-to-earth reason and human effort. Will Joseph be able to resist the influences of his adopted home? Or is Joseph becoming an Egyptian?

✓ **Joseph's rise to rule over the family Chs. 42-44**

First visit of Joseph's family to Egypt 42:1-38

Chs 42-44 form a balanced counterpart to chs 39-41. Chs 39-41 involve Joseph's rise in and rule over Egypt. Chs 42-44 concerns his rule over his brothers and his father. The rule over his brothers could only happen as a result of his rule over Egypt, so that had to happen first for the second to take place. (Brueggemann 335)

The motif of buying and selling is important in 41: 57-42:6. Those who sold their brother are coming to buy grain from him. Joseph of course recognizes his brothers but they do not recognize him.

His brothers bowing down to him fulfills the first dream that he had back in Canaan, but what of the second? So he charges them with spying in order to find out about the rest of his family. He does not know if they will tell him the truth if he discloses his identity. He does not know if they still harbor deadly hatred for him. So he deceives them in order to test them. At first we wonder if it is all personal revenge, but we are slowly shown it is not.

He therefore detains Simeon, who may well have been the ringleader who sold Joseph, and sends the rest to fetch his youngest brother. This detention serves two purposes:

1. Simeon becomes a hostage in order to get Benjamin to Egypt,
2. It poses his brothers with a similar temptation as when they sent Joseph to Egypt – will they abandon Simeon as they had abandoned Joseph? The analogy is not lost on them, for they acknowledge that their distress is just retribution for their callous treatment of their other brother, Joseph.

Nearly all the actors are trapped by their **past**. The brothers cannot escape the power of their past guilt by being honest with either Joseph (who they do not yet recognize) or their father. 20 years cannot dull the memory of their sin against their brother, nor ease their sense of guilt. They are bound

by the power of an unforgiven past, immobilized by guilt and driven by anxiety. They live in fear of provoking another outburst of paternal sorrow if Benjamin is taken from Jacob. Locked into their past, they cannot be open to any new possibility or to think of any generation after themselves. Jacob himself is even more paranoid, suspecting his sons of selling Simeon and determined not to let Benjamin from his sight. All his words reflect the heavy loss of Joseph. Jacob is resolved to risk no more, certainly not his beloved Benjamin. It is only Joseph who appears in control of the situation, though he too suffers emotionally at seeing his brothers and remembering how they had treated him. Should he ignore them altogether? Meet their needs but send them off without revealing anything? Dredge up the past? Abandon his Hebrew heritage or his Egyptian position in which he is confident and successful? Our past can and often does control our **present** and our **future**. Do we allow it to cut us off from important relationships?

There is still one more test the brothers must go through in order to prove themselves worthy of reconciliation. In the meantime, the favorite son becomes the deceiver of his brothers and of his own father as he refuses to reveal who he is to them – yet.

Second visit of Joseph's family to Egypt 43:1-45:28

This is the section of the story in which Benjamin is finally released to go with the brothers to Egypt, they obtain food from Joseph but the cup is placed in Benjamin's sack in order to test the brothers concerning their devotion to both Benjamin and Jacob. They pass the test and the brothers are reconciled.

There are three levels of interpretation for most of these stories, which we have been doing for many of the narratives:

1. The personal interaction and psychological development of the characters
2. The place of the particular passage in the plot of the story being presented
3. The contribution of the episode to the themes of Genesis as a whole.

Personal Interaction and Character Development

Jacob is still patriarchal head since he makes the ultimate decisions for the tribe. But he is living in the past, lavishing his love on Benjamin as formerly he had done on Joseph, still regarding Rachel as his only wife, still mourning the death of Joseph, and still mistrustful of his other sons. Because of this skewed focus, he was no longer able to make decisions that were in the best interest of the tribe. While he thought only of his own misfortunes, Judah confronted him with the plight of the family and Jacob was forced to listen, eventually conceding to the facts. His final instructions (v. 14) indicate that he realizes it is out of his hands and that he will have to trust in the **mercy** of God – for him an important step to take. In order for the family to

survive, Jacob must be willing to risk the life of Benjamin who is his only son, whom he loves (like Isaac). If "Israel" is to live and not die, Jacob must give up the one he holds most dear. It is difficult to know where faith leaves off and cynical resignation to the reality of starvation sets in. (Brueggemann 339)

However, the sons have **changed**, as represented by their chief spokesman, Judah. By offering himself as pledge for Benjamin's safety, he is outwardly acknowledging Benjamin as a true brother. Does he mean it? Soon we discover yes. Yet the brothers are still trapped by their past, unable to be frank with their father and their guilt weighs heavily upon them, interpreting setbacks in Egypt as divine punishment for their treatment of Joseph. But there is a tremendous change in their acceptance of that guilt and wrongdoing. Joseph has carefully crafted an opportunity to betray Benjamin in much the same way that they had gotten rid of Joseph originally, if their feelings towards him had not changed.

His chalice is symbolic of his authority. Many thought such goblets could be used to predict the future and had supernatural powers. Their plea (through Judah) for Benjamin shows how completely they have repented of their former sins. No more moving example of true contrition and repentance may be found in scripture except perhaps in the parable of the prodigal son. It is the longest speech in Genesis. Judah mentions Jacob 14 times, which illustrates the central point of the speech, not so much Benjamin as their father. They are able to accept Jacob for who he is and love him despite his failings, for they recognize his extreme love for Benjamin, his recognition of only one true wife (v.27), his dependence on Benjamin to keep him alive even though there are 10 other children in the family. (44:30-31) Not out of rancor, bitterness or envy, but truly out of love are they appealing to Joseph. They pass the test with flying colors.

Joseph himself recognizes that there is no reason to hold vengeful thoughts against his brothers, for God has meant all of this for good and the protection of many. There is no personal vindication but absolution (pardon) and forgiveness. Now we have an answer to the question of Joseph – will he become an Egyptian? No, he has chosen to remain a brother to his brothers and a son to his father and to the elect line of God.

45:3 "I am Joseph!" This is a self-assertion, which serves to reshape and redefine the entire situation. The family is suddenly set in a new context. Their presumed world has been irreversibly shattered and turned upside down. Though the brothers fear that Joseph will now exploit and act out the past, Joseph does not. He breaks with the past and invites his brothers put the past behind them. The power to create newness does not come from detachment or indifference, but from risky, self-disclosing engagement. Now the narrator has Joseph make the main point three times – "**God** sent me to

preserve life" (5b), "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant" (v.7) and "it was not you who sent me, but God, and he has made me father and lord and ruler" (v. 8). (Brueggemann 344-6)

The Place of the Passage in the Overall Story

This coincides with the theme of this story, that of God's overruling of human affairs. At the same time, this story and the rest of Scripture insist that both divine sovereignty and human responsibility and freedom are true. The author spends time presenting the cost of the hatred among the members of this family, Jacob's grief, Joseph's unjust imprisonment and the brothers' guilty consciences. Full repentance and forgiveness are only possible after the brothers' sincere repentance. Though the story reveals God's use of the sins of Joseph's brothers for good, it nowhere excuses their sins or pretends they can be forgotten. On the one hand, Joseph told them "you sold me" (45:5) but at the same time he reminded them "God sent me". It was all part of the divine historical plan for God's people. We see the same in the NT – while Jesus' death was divinely predestined, Judas bore full responsibility for it (Lk 22:22). One needs to look at both aspects of every event – the human dimension, which is often skewed and misshapen, and the divine dimension, which graciously works for our good. Faith makes it possible to fix our attention on the latter and live our lives in the confidence that even the worst things that happen to us are used by God for our good (Rom 8:28-9). (Arnold 159) Neither the freedom of the creature nor the gracious sovereignty of God is cancelled. What we discover is the following:

For God's people ~

- God's ultimate purpose is finally sovereign. It will not be altered.
- The sovereign character of God's purpose can create a real **newness**, a Genesis, that negates the past, redefines the present and opens up the future. This Joseph narrative, of one who was dead being found alive, is a precursor for the Prodigal Son and ultimately for Christ himself.
- The narrative asserts that God's purpose is utterly gracious. Yahweh wills **life** for his people.
- The narrative affirms that God's purpose is hidden and mysterious. That is why "story" is the proper mode for this faith, as God's purpose is revealed over time through human beings.
- God's purposes are worked out in concrete history through the actions of identifiable persons. (Brueggemann 347-8) General William Booth, founder of Salvation Army, stated "Work as if everything depended on your work, and pray as if everything depended upon your prayer." (Briscoe 369)

How the Story Fits into the Themes of Genesis

This story reports yet another stage in the story of God's saving purpose for the whole world. His fulfillment of the promises of many descendants and a blessing on other nations are clearly heralded here, only land is laid aside temporarily.

Application Questions: Chapters 41-45

✓ Teaching on Forgiveness

We can see that Joseph has forgiven his brothers and wants to be reconciled with them. This entire passage is an excellent practical expression of the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. Let's discuss this further now. Please review the following passages and answer the questions below concerning each passage: Mt 6:9-15; Mt 18:21-35; Rom 12:17-21.

1. What does this passage tell us about God's forgiveness?
2. What does this passage tell us about the necessity of Christians forgiving others?
3. Is this passage dealing only with forgiving other Christians, unbelievers, or possibly both?
4. Was the forgiveness contingent on the offender being repentant and asking for forgiveness?

I. The History of Forgiveness

(Part I from William Hinson, *The Power of Holy Habits*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 96-97.)

In the history of humanity we find a progression of sorts with regard to revenge and forgiveness. A long time ago, before even the Old Testament was written and in other cultures which did not know of the OT, people practiced **unlimited retaliation**. You injure my child and I will wipe out your entire tribe. You take one of my cows and I will burn your house down and kill your family. Before the Law of Moses we see this operative among the Patriarchs, as in the story of Dinah and Shechem in Gen 34.

When we received the Law of Moses, God taught us a new level of ethical behavior, called **limited retaliation**. The Israelites were told that they should practice an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Exodus 21:23-25). Although this may sound severe, it represented a great step forward in the progress of humanity's understanding of ethical behavior towards other human beings. The punishment had to fit the crime, but no more than that. This was a tremendous advance and if we believe in progressive revelation, probably all that humanity could understand at the time. This law, called *lex talionis*, is, in fact, what many of today's judicial systems around the world

are based upon. As we read the Psalms, we hear of the psalmist calling upon God for this kind of retaliation, to be meted out by God Himself (Ps 137:7-9).

The first step in humanity's understanding of **forgiveness** came about as people learned to forgive those people who loved them. Hence, they practiced **limited forgiveness**. Jesus talked about people like that in His Sermon on the Mount. He said even the sinners and tax-gatherers love those who love them. Often people balk at taking even this step in their relationships with others, refusing to forgive those who are family and close friends, much less strangers or enemies. But Jesus asks us to go one enormous step further: **unlimited forgiveness**. "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:44). He not only spoke those words to us, but lived those words out to the fullest extent possible, giving his own life on the cross for every sinner, every destroyer, every person throughout the history of the world, no matter how vile or filled with evil. And then he asked his Father to forgive them at the very moment he was being killed by them.

II. Our Responsibility

We are asked to do no less. How is this possible? How can we possibly accomplish something which seems so utterly impossible? Yet we have discovered from our biblical passages that indeed, we put our souls in jeopardy if we are unable to forgive when someone does us harm. Unforgiveness damages us AND our relationship with God.

John and Charles Wesley and General James Oglethorpe became good friends while on their long sea voyage to the colony of Georgia in 1735-6. One day the subject of forgiveness came up in their discussions. General Oglethorpe was adamant that he made it a practice never to forgive. John Wesley responded, "Well, sir, I hope you never sin." Wesley knew that our own forgiveness by God has always been tied to our willingness to forgive others.

Hence, forgiveness is first of all, for the Christian, a religious obligation that we owe to the person who has offended us. It is because Christ forgave us and we have received His forgiveness that we are to go and do likewise. But there is also an important benefit to the forgiver as well. The first person who gains from forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving, and the first person injured by refusal to forgive is the one who was wronged in the first place. Unwillingness to forgive leads to bitterness, hatred, rebellion against God (since He has called us to forgive), and often many physical health problems such as ulcers, high blood pressure and depression. We place ourselves in bondage as long as we refuse to forgive! The opposite, when one forgives an offender, leads to inner peace, joy, health & stability.

Forgiveness by the offended for the offender opens up the possibility of the offender asking God and the offended for forgiveness as well. This is because whenever an individual offends another, the offender gives up a certain degree of power in determining his or her own destiny, with the power being given over to the offended. As a concrete example of this, if one is robbed, one may go to the judicial system and require that the offender be placed in jail, thus affecting the offender's near-term destiny. It is as if the offender is handing over a legal note to the offended, with which the offended now has power over the offender's life. This power can be used to retaliate, to seek vengeance, or to forgive.

In actuality, when we forgive an individual or a group, we can say to God, "This person has offended You more than he has offended me (Ps 51:4 "against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned..."). I give all my legal rights over to You, dear Lord, because I know that You are a just and righteous God. I am not worthy to judge another person, but You are. Use my forgiving reaction to this person to advance Your kingdom on earth. Use my forgiving reaction to this person to change myself, as I know it will, so that I may be a better ambassador for You. If possible, use my forgiving reaction to this person to change him, so that he may see You more clearly and seek Your merciful forgiveness for himself. Use this offense to bring this person into a loving relationship with Yourself, or to deepen that relationship if he already knows You."

III. What forgiveness is ~

A simple definition of forgiveness is releasing the other person from retaliation and wishing the other person well.

IV. What forgiveness is not ~

To understand more fully what forgiveness is, it is very important that we recognize what forgiveness is not. First of all, forgiveness does not avoid justice. It does not whitewash the wrong that was done, since nothing that whitewashes evil can be good. It does not pretend that the evil never took place. There may still be consequences for the evil that was done, even though the wrong was forgiven by the offended. The offender may still need to experience the penalty for and consequences of his actions, so forgiveness is not a pardon. These consequences may be natural or they may be judicial. For example, a woman may choose to have a child out of wedlock and may be forgiven by her family for doing so, but she must still raise that child and the family must still help in that process. Or a person may steal repeatedly, be forgiven by the last person from whom he stole, but must still pay the penalty of a jail sentence in the hope that the incarceration will bring about repentance on the part of the thief that will permanently change this evil behavior into more acceptable behavior. People are still responsible for their actions, whether good or bad.

Secondly, forgiveness does not result automatically in reconciliation. Ideally, forgiveness can bring about reconciliation but that requires the response of the offender as well as the offended. The offender must realize the sin that has been committed, confess it with godly sorrow, repent of it and seek never to repeat the offense. The offended person cannot take responsibility for how the offender will respond to forgiveness, so the offended person is not held accountable before God as long as he offers forgiveness to the offender. That is why Rom 12:18 states, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." (my italics) If you have forgiven, but the other person wishes to continue to sin against you, then that is their responsibility before God, not yours.

A corollary to this is that forgiveness does not require the offended to step back into a relationship of trust with the offender. We are called to forgive and we are called to pray for our enemies, thus to care about them. But we are not required to trust them until they have proven themselves trustworthy again. This is of course especially important when the offender does not recognize his sin, repent, and turn from his ways. God does not want you to trust someone who is not trustworthy and therefore allow him to sin again against you. We can illustrate this with the following diagram. (Go through the diagram at this time.)

Forgiveness is not forgetting. Deep hurts can rarely be wiped out of one's awareness completely, though time and God can do wonderful things here. Do not be surprised if you still remember what took place. If hatred, anger, and bitterness are felt at the memory, ask God to help you to forgive. If sorrow for the offense but compassion for the offender is present, you are well on your way to complete forgiveness.

Forgiveness is also not condoning the bad behavior or dismissing it. Again, whitewashing evil is an evil in itself. Forgiveness is a personal transaction that releases the one offended from the offense (but not necessarily releasing the offender), and places the offended in proper relationship with God so that God may use the offended and/or the offense to reach the offender.

V. An Important Point of Theology

Perhaps one of the most asked questions by Christians concerning forgiveness is whether or not the offender must seek forgiveness (implying repentance on their part) before they can be forgiven. That is why we looked at the Bible passages from that aspect as well. After all, the argument goes, the parables on forgiveness seem to indicate that the person is asking to be forgiven first. And when we look at salvation, we see that God cannot forgive without repentance on the part of the sinner. Otherwise we have a cheap grace and universal salvation, whether one recognizes his need for a savior or not. Hence, how can we forgive without that repentance as well?

I think above all else this question is answered at the cross. There, Jesus asks the Father to “forgive them for they know not what they do.” Did the Roman soldier ask to be forgiven when he nailed Christ’s hands and feet to the cross? Did the crowd who reviled him ask for forgiveness for their taunts and evil words? Did the Jewish officials who sent him to his death ask for that forgiveness as well? During that period of overwhelming, excruciating pain but complete forgiveness at the cross, Jesus is as truly an example for what we may become through him as was the rest of his life and words. We are to intercede for our enemies before God himself – that is the fulfillment of the meaning and the heart of forgiveness. We leave the judgment in his hands, for he alone can judge the heart.

During World War II, ninety-two thousand women and children died in the death camp Ravensbruck. Most of them were Jews. This prayer was found scrawled on a scrap of paper near a dead child:

“Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will but also those of ill will. But do not only remember the suffering they have inflicted on us; remember the fruits we have brought, thanks to this suffering – our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this, and when they come to judgment, let all the fruits we have borne be their forgiveness.” (Gire 116)

VI. The process of forgiveness

What must we do in order to forgive? The following will give you some general guidelines that will be helpful in the process of forgiveness.

1. Don’t deny **feelings** of hurt, anger, or shame. Rather, acknowledge these feelings and commit yourself to doing something positive about them with the help of God.
2. Don’t just focus on the **person** who has harmed you, but identify the specific offensive behavior.
3. Make a conscious **decision** not to seek revenge or nurse a grudge and decide instead to forgive. This conversion of the heart is a critical stage toward forgiveness. Do not rely on emotions but set your **will** with the help of God to forgive the other person.
4. Formulate a rationale for forgiving. List the reasons for doing so, including ideas such as “Christ forgave me of my terrible sins which nailed Him to the cross so I should also forgive / I will experience inner healing and move on with my life / God can more effectively work on the other person if I exemplify Christ’s forgiveness to him,” etc.
5. **Think** differently about the offender. Try to see things from the offender’s perspective. We have an expression in America, that before we judge another we should walk a mile in their shoes.

6. Accept the **pain** you've experienced without passing it off to others, including the offender. Remember how Christ did that for us on the cross.
7. Choose to extend **goodwill** and **mercy** toward the other; wish for the well-being of that person and pray for them. Realize that this process may take time and do not give up if at first you still experience some feelings of bitterness towards the offender. Ask God to help you with those feelings.
8. Think about how it feels to be **released** from a burden or grudge. Be open to emotional relief. Seek meaning in the suffering you experienced. Realize that God can use it to conform you to the image of Christ (Rom 8:28-29). God can also use it to help others in their times of suffering (2 Cor 1:3-4).
9. Realize the paradox of forgiveness: as you let go and forgive the offender, you are experiencing release and healing. As you forgive, you are forgiven. As you forgive, you move from the place of victim to that of **victor** in Christ!

--Information in sections II-VI above from "The Forgiveness Factor" by Gary Thomas, Christianity Today, January 10, 2000.

Does it still seem impossible? Often we cannot experience the grace and power of God until we take the first step of obedience to His word. Take that step now.

Let me share with you a story of someone who did just that, many years ago. Corrie Ten Boom was a Christian who was sent to the Ravensbruck concentration camp during World War II because she dared to hide Jews from the Nazis in her native Holland. She experienced tremendous suffering and torture, the death of her beloved father, and finally the death of her own sister Betsie, who had shared the horrors of the camp with her for many months. Her own life was miraculously saved just before she would have been exterminated at the camp. After the war, she set up a home in Bloemendaal for those whose lives had been destroyed by the war, and spoke as often as she could to groups about how God had guided and protected the two sisters during those harrowing years. She said:

...But the place where the hunger (for Betsie's story) was greatest was Germany. Germany was a land of ruins, cities of ashes and rubble, but more terrifying still, minds and hearts of ashes. Just to cross the border was to feel the great weight that hung over that land.

It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was

all there – the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie’s pain-blانched face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. “How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein.” He said. “To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!”

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself. (Corrie Ten Boom, *The Hiding Place*, Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 1971, pp. 214-5)

Who do you need to forgive? Is there a person, a group of people? Was something done to your family by others that you have not forgiven? Might you even need to forgive yourself? Did you let yourself down at some point and have not accepted your own failings? Or do you need to forgive God of something as well? Where do you find bitterness in your memories and thoughts? As we are healed and set free through forgiveness from those burdens, we find ourselves free to fully love ourselves, others, and most importantly, God. Free yourself today to love! Then take this message back to your families, your churches, your friends, and live this message out before your enemies. Though they may continue to see you as their enemy, they will be your enemies no more.

Forgiveness Discussion Questions.

THE MOVE TO EGYPT AND THE REST OF THE STORY

✓ Third visit of family to Egypt 46:1 - 47:31

The fact that the entire family is now brought out of Canaan to Egypt raises an important question in the minds of the readers – was the Israelite migration to Egypt a big mistake? This question is addressed quickly and concisely. The only divine vision in the Joseph story, indeed the last in the entire book, reassures Jacob (not Joseph) that it is God’s will to enter Egypt, and emphasizes that the family’s sojourn in Egypt will only be temporary. God also reassures Jacob that he will go with him, just as at the beginning in ch. 28. The old promises of chs 12-36 are still operative. It is confirmation that Joseph’s understanding of what God has been doing is a true one. And it is a furtherance of the promise of God to Abraham. “I will make of you a great nation.” To Jacob it is: “I will there make of you a great nation.” This is the next step.

But is Joseph’s treatment of the poverty-stricken Egyptians one of a cunning, self-seeking agent for the Pharaoh? OT law itself does not envisage the destitute simply being bailed out by the more well-to-do. Members of a family should help their destitute relatives, just as Joseph did, by buying their land and employing them as slaves (Lev 25:13-55). This was viewed as a great act of charity. For Israelites, the Jubilee Year would free them and their land every 50 years. Apparently the Pharaoh was not as generous but Joseph cannot be blamed for this. The reserves of food are also potential sources of oppression, as is anything that is in short supply and needed for life. Famine in Africa is often the result of poor rain and harvests, but also of corrupt governments that sold the surpluses of grain for cash in the good years. They could have learned something from Joseph! Joseph allowed the farmers to keep farming their lands and retain 4/5 of the produce. He saved Egypt from famine in the process.

✓ Last days of Jacob and Joseph 48:1 – 50:26

Jacob

Dies at 147 years.

Jacob’s Blessing on Joseph’s Sons (Ch 48)

Parallels with Isaac’s deathbed scene.

Patriarchal blindness	48:10	//	27:1
Blessing pronounced on younger son (Manasseh older/Ephraim younger)	48:14-6	//	27:27-9

Protest	48:17-8	//	27:34-6
Reaffirmation of preference	48:19-20	//	27:37-40
Second blessing pronounced	49:2-28	//	28:2-6

Throughout the closing chapters there are many other references to earlier episodes in the book. We have already discussed the meaning behind the double blessing of Joseph's sons, where Jacob is in effect adopting Ephraim and Manasseh as his own two sons (v.5). In future lists of the 12 tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh are normally included in place of Joseph. In fact, the lineage of Ephraim would eventually take the place of the deposed Reuben as the leader of the 12 tribes, in 1 Chron 5:1,2, because Reuben defiled his father's bed.

The blessing here is completely focused on God – 4 times he is named (v. 15 times 2, v. 16, v.20). The act of reversal is inexplicable, as has been every major turn in the life of this family. It is as though it is not Jacob's to decide, as though he were helpless to keep the power of the blessing from having its own way. The nation of Israel dares to believe that a future is set, not by an old man making an error, but by the power of God. (Brueggemann 363) Differently than Jacob and Esau's own blessings from Isaac, here it is truly a blessing for both sons. There are no words which discriminate for the one brother against the other as there were for Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau. The words leave things equal here. (Brueggemann 364)

The story of Jacob is dominated by his quest for blessing, now at the end of his life he looks back and declares that "God has blessed me" (48:3). Here too Jacob transmits the religious heritage of divine ancestral promise onto his own offspring. Jacob is the last eye-witness among the Patriarchs to the direct disclosure of God's will, and he fulfills his obligation to pass on the heritage here, near death. Joseph will reiterate the promise on his own deathbed in 50:24. The oath and promises of God are repeated at critical moments throughout Genesis.

The title of Gen 49 would be better the Testament of Jacob than the blessing of Jacob, since there are both curses and blessings. It is the first long poem in the Bible. Judah and Joseph are given pride of place. We see here a mixture of long sayings particularly on these two sons with quite short sayings on the other sons that pun on their names or compare them to animals.

Jacob's death is mourned in the Egyptian manner as for a king – 70 days. The family's burial trip from Egypt to Canaan anticipates the much later Exodus to come and the ultimate fulfillment of the promises. Once again, the storyline relates the theme of Pentateuch, the partial fulfillment of the promises to the patriarchs. Despite their failings, they are portrayed as men of faith who places their trust in these promises and looked forward to the day of their fulfillment.

The brothers_

The Joseph story reminds us that the past is not easily forgotten, and with Jacob's death, the brothers start to worry again that Joseph might seek revenge. For the first time they frankly confess their sin and plead for forgiveness, though their apparent subterfuge concerning their father's words and their lack of trust in Joseph made Joseph weep. They again fall down before him and offer to become his slaves. This is the first time we are told they bow down to Joseph as Joseph, not as an Egyptian prince. The brothers know that the only one who can break the cycle and banish the guilt is the wronged party, the one whom they most fear. The fact that they again fall down brings the encounter into relation with the dream in ch 37, bringing the connection forward fully to the end of the story here in ch 50. (Brueggemann 370) Joseph is wisely able to explain the purpose of all his sufferings, that God planned it for good so that many people might live. "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to preserve many people alive" (v. 19) This is **a summary of the entire Joseph narrative**. God has a plan for his people, a good plan, and that plan will not be defeated. The story reminds us that God delivers innocent sufferers and secures through them great salvation. This principle of salvation being brought to all through the suffering of the innocent one finds its clearest expression in the NT in the life, death and exaltation of our Lord.

Joseph_

Though the Joseph story occupies a position roughly equivalent to those of Abraham and Jacob, Joseph is clearly set apart from the earlier patriarchs. He does not form part of the triad to whom the promise of land and posterity (descendants) is given – he nowhere in the story receives direct information, blessing or words from God as the other three, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, do. He becomes the first to and through whom the promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is only reiterated (50:24). Many generations of Hebrews will follow in his wake. In fact, the direct line of blessing for the entire world will flow through Judah, not Joseph at all. Joseph instead is the means of preserving the family in a foreign country (a threat to the divine promise of land), and explains how and why the family-clan-nation had to be brought out of Egypt before it could be blessed with the Promised Land. This is the story we will take up again in Exodus.

**** Group Activity: Persons of Genesis**

Lesson 11

EXODUS

✓ Third visit of family to Egypt 46:1 - 47:31

EXODUS THROUGH DEUTERONOMY

Now let us turn to the other four books of the Pentateuch. We will only be able to present general information on each of them at this time.

EXODUS

Its name comes from the Greek, "departure". In Hebrew, the book is called "these are the names" or "names" for short, from the first sentence of book. Exodus is the true birth of a nation at Sinai and can also be summarized as "Guidance out of Egypt"

✓ ANE Background

ANE Background to time of Exodus: (LaSor 56-58)

- This was a very advanced and cosmopolitan world with much cultural diffusion and extensive international contacts
- This called for international alliances and elaborate system of treaties, also principle of law extending beyond local boundaries
- Literary diffusion was remarkable with many myths, epics, and ideas being written down and disseminated for first time in history of this part of world
- Alphabetic writing instead of symbols made literacy possible on large scale and communications much more available and easy – scripts date 1700-1200 BC Hebrew one of these alphabetic writings so OT events could be recorded
- Israel appeared at the right time and place to inherit highest cultural legacy of ANE, also at a time when the ANE struggles had exhausted all the combatants, so there was no single mighty rule. Gave opportunity for Israelites to establish selves in Promised Land and develop own nation-state free from threat of outside dominant power, until Assyrians arose in mid-8th century.

When did Exodus take place? Two views are most prevalent:

1400s

1200s

The exact dating is not known.

✓ Egyptian background

The culture was highly polytheistic except for one specific period, which I would like to discuss with you now:

Pharaoh Amenhotep IV (ruled approximately 1352 to 1335 B.C.) did something more than build buildings and empires as the other pharaohs had done. He began a new religion by declaring that Aten (or Aton), the Sun Disk, was the only god. This movement towards a type of monotheism was not well received in a land steeped in polytheism. Each of the main gods had a location of worship and a priesthood which held great power over the people. In an attempt to transfer that power to his own god, Amenhotep moved his capital away from Thebes, the center for Amon worship (one of the main gods), and built a new capital to Aten, called Akhetaten. He changed his own name as well, to Ahkenaten. This era became known as the Amarna revolution, because of the great political and religious turmoil which took place. None of it lasted, for as soon as Ahkenaten died, the land returned to its polytheism. Ramses I and son Seti sought to recoup what had been lost in power and prestige by previous pharaohs through new acquisition of lands

It was into this time of empire-building and cosmopolitan culture that Moses was born, if we accept the later date of Exodus. Egypt had developed international ties throughout the Ancient Near East. This required an extensive system of outposts and embassies, plus a highly trained scribal class to maintain the international correspondence. There was extensive cultural diffusion as the various peoples interacted with each other. Laws were no longer viewed as local, but were being spread across national boundaries. Deity diffusion was also taking place, as people compared their gods with those they encountered in other lands and incorporated those they found useful. Literary diffusion included the spread of the Canaanite alphabetic writing which would aid in literacy and the transmission of histories (to the benefit of the Hebrew people as well).

As Exodus opens, Pharaoh (perhaps Seti) is worried about the tremendous population increase of the Hebrews because of its threat to the security of his empire. This blessing of God on the descendents of Abraham is met by Pharaoh with resistance and attempt at control. He decides he will use the people as slave labor to decrease their numbers. This practice of inscription into slave labor for building projects is documented as having taken place in Egypt only during the period between 1450 and 1200 BCE, coinciding well with the history of the Hebrew people, whether early or late date. Exodus 1:11 specifies their slave labor assignment as working on the cities of Pithom and Raamses in the delta area, again fitting Egyptian historical information

well, including the Egyptian desire to protect this vulnerable area from repeated foreign invasion.

When slave labor does not succeed and their numbers continue to increase, Pharaoh decides to take further action by declaring infant genocide. Since all pharaohs were considered gods and therefore held the power of life and death over their subjects, this was well within his prerogative to do so. Moses of course is rescued from this dire fate by the daughter of the Pharaoh, raised by her and educated within the royal system. Egyptian sources reveal that there existed during this time such harems and a fine educational system. Records also show that select foreigners were allowed to be trained in this way. Moses probably received an education in reading, writing and administration, which would be particularly useful when leading an entire nation of people through the wilderness. He may also have received instruction on national leadership, useful to his future role. Yet he obviously knew his own Hebrew background when he slew the Egyptian.

His return after exile to become the representative of Yahweh to Pharaoh (perhaps Ramses II) was vital to God's plan. Here was a man raised in Pharaoh's courts, knowing the ways of the system. It was not uncommon that people would petition the Pharaoh to have their concerns heard by him, so Moses' petition would not be considered unusual. The fact that he represented the one God Yahweh would meet with a different reaction, however. If the Amarna Revolution with Pharaoh Amenhotep had not yet happened, then the Exodus event may have influenced this later Pharaoh to consider the possibility of a single god. If the Amarna Revolution had already taken place, then the Pharaoh facing Moses was well aware of the disaster this previous attempt at monotheism had caused for the Egyptian empire. No wonder he sneered at this God and refused to acknowledge him. This is the story of the Exodus.

✓ **2 parts to Exodus**

1. Ch 1-18 Israel's delivery from slavery in Egypt by God
2. Ch 19-40 God enters into covenant with them (Mosaic or Sinaitic Covenant), followed by the giving of the law and construction of the tabernacle at Sinai

✓ **Revelation of the divine name**

v 3:15 – used in Genesis. Either a later writer was using it to designate God when the name was not yet known (since we know Genesis was written well

after the events described in it), or God is now revealing the meaning of the name which was actually given much earlier in the history of all people.

Yahweh (tetragrammaton YHWH) probably means something like "I am who I am" "I am truly present now, ready to act" and can indicate totality and intensity, "I am the foundation of everything, the only real reality." Much later in Jewish history, we know that the holy name was not spoken out of reverence for God. Jews used the word "Adonai" (meaning "Lord") instead whenever they came to this word and placed vowel markings to indicate this in the later Hebrew Bible. Every time you see LORD in your Bible, it is translating Yahweh. Early German translations took the vowel markings literally and replaced Y with a German J – that is where Jehovah comes from!

√ **The Plagues**

All plagues except the 10th are natural phenomenon. Of the nine, all except hail form a sequence of natural events which exhibit a cause and effect relationship in the very order they take place. (LaSor 69) The first 9 plagues are divided into groups of three, with the first plague of each group (1st, 4th, 7th) preceded by a warning to Pharaoh as he walked next to the Nile River in the morning. The last plague in each of the three groups (3rd, 6th, 9th) is unannounced. Even though it is true that each of the first nine plagues is documented as natural occurrences in the region, God still is demonstrating His absolute control, sovereignty and universal power over events by:

- He distinguished between his people and the Egyptians
- He controlled the extent and areas affected by each plague
- He announced the timing of each and could halt it as quickly
- The final plague has no natural explanation at all

God brought about the events according to His timing in order to accomplish His purposes. Most of the plagues directly confront the "power" of an Egyptian deity and shows God's supreme and unmatched power as a result. In the 10th plague, Pharaoh forfeits his own firstborn (who is supposed to be a god also) to Yahweh as punishment for his refusal to let Yahweh's firstborn (His people) go. The result is the revelation that God is stronger than Pharaoh and any other gods of Egypt, God is the only one true God, and God is sovereign Lord of creation and in control of all nature.

√ **The character of deliverance**

The deliverance from Egypt enables us to glimpse the grand unity of God's plan for the salvation of the world.

- a. **Liberation and redemption.** Deliverance is from bondage to slavery so it is an act of liberation and redemption. This is the basis for Heilsgeschichte, whether OT or NT. The Law of Moses goes on to reveal God's deep concern for various forms of oppression and injustice. Yahweh demands righteousness, justice and mercy in the economic, social and legal spheres. Spiritual bondage lies at the taproot of politically oppressive systems. Spiritual freedom brings justice and mercy to all.
- b. **Creation of a people.** Primary objective of deliverance is the formation of a unique people of God. "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God" (Ex 6:7). They are to know the true and living God and witness to the truth while surrounded by apostasy and falsehood. So we are to do so today.
- c. **Dependence upon divine intervention.** This deliverance could not have taken place without God's direct work in history. It is Yahweh who is the great liberator – he sets his people free from the oppressive powers of darkness. So, too, we know that our liberation through Christ could not have been accomplished by any act of our own.
- d. **Involvement of human agency.** Despite divine intervention, Yahweh's deliverance did involve human agency. It was through Moses and Aaron that the message was given to Pharaoh. They were God's mouthpiece and mediator, just as God has chosen to work through human beings to bring his message to the world today.

√ **Continued influence of Egypt**

The influence of Egypt on the Hebrews continued as they moved into the wilderness. Sadly, it was an influence of temptation that they could not seem to overcome. First, it was the influence of a wealthy, powerful, cosmopolitan culture vs. the empty, threatening expanse of dangerous wilderness. Even though they had been slaves, they remembered the good foods and security they had experienced. Nostalgia depends upon selective amnesia and this was a people who quickly forgot the hardships of slavery. The Egyptian culture continued to call to the entire generation, until they were sure the only answer was to return to Egypt (Numbers 14). They went so far as to call Egypt the land of milk and honey! (Num. 16) But that is outside the book of Exodus. How quickly the people complain and how clearly their complaints are directed against God and not just Moses!

The influence of religion also haunted them in the wilderness. They had been immersed in a polytheistic culture for 400 years. It is no wonder that

Moses himself had to ask God to reveal who He was in Exodus 3, for few would remember Yahweh accurately. The people, then, felt justified in asking for another god when this first one and His human cohort seemed to have disappeared on them in Ex. 32. Probably the golden calf represented one of the many gods they would have known from Egypt. But God would not give up on them. He began to give them a structure and system that would remind them of what He had done for them, give them guidance in what they should do, and allow for His presence among them.

✓ **Four major Jewish institutions rooted in Exodus**

There are four major, foundational Jewish institutions that have their roots in this book:

- Passover (along with other special days of observance & remembrance): holy time
- The Covenant Law: holy relationship
- The Tabernacle: holy place
- The Priesthood: holy people

#1: PASSOVER signifies redemption/miraculous deliverance from slavery and beginnings of the nation of Israel:

- Blood of an unblemished lamb on doorposts protects believers from death (Jesus)
- All eat of the meat of the lamb roasted by fire
- 7 days of unleavened bread as reminder of their hasty departure
- Bitter herbs represent the bitterness of slavery in Egypt

Two other pilgrimage festivals were inaugurated in the book of Exodus as well, the Feast of Harvest (Weeks/Pentecost) and the Feast of Ingathering (Tabernacles/Booths). These two along with the Feast of Unleavened Bread (coming just after Passover) required the presence of all the men to come before God (Ex 23:14-17). These two dealt specifically with harvesting crops and therefore would not be performed until after the chosen people settled in the Promised Land. Hence, sacred seasons were set up in order to remind the people that God was God of time as well as of place. The ultimate reminder of sacred time, the Sabbath, also is instituted officially with the 10 Commandments, to commemorate God's act of creation (Ex 20:11).

NOTE: HOLY TIMES

#2: COVENANT, a means of establishing a relationship (not naturally existing), which is sanctioned by an oath sworn in a ceremony of ratification.

NOTE: HOLY RELATIONSHIP

The suzerainty treaty between vassals and overlords/kings (or between two heads of state) was well known in ANE including Egypt so the people would recognize its authority and legitimacy. The Mosaic covenant had many of the same elements as these treaties. Note that the covenant was established in the book of Exodus but other parts of the covenant treaty are found throughout the rest of Pentateuch. We will discuss covenant treaty language more in Dt. **Ex 19:3-8 is unique in ANE as a covenant treaty set up directly between humans and God, not just among humans.**

With Abraham's covenant it is God who is taking the oath, binding himself to His promises. In Sinai, the people take the oath and the obligation is obedience to the covenant stipulations. There was a curse for disobedience as well, which Israel came to experience.

God is saying to this people, "I invite you into a relationship with me." He describes what He has done for them (19:4-6), which shows His trustworthiness and faithfulness. God brings to the relationship His power, love and provision. The people have only themselves to bring to the relationship and that is all that God is asking – He asks for obedience in a relationship of love! We are the same way when we come to God. We have nothing to offer which would benefit God, but all that He desires is our commitment to Him in obedience and love. He does all the rest!

The Main Purpose of the covenant at Mt. Sinai is that God calls the children of Israel to become "A kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (19:6) Consider that if Israel is the nation of "priests", who are the people of the congregation? The rest of the world! Israel is to become a model of holiness and spread God's love to all people. 1 Peter 2:9 applies these very words to the new children of God, His Church. These words are consistent with the previous covenant which God established with Abraham: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Blessing the whole world is God's plan and He has chosen this people to do so. How we see that they fall short!

LAW CODE established at Mt. Sinai is similar in form to other ANE law codes, but with distinctive features (remember that much is revealed by comparison to ANE practices). How are God's laws different from those of the surrounding ANE?

- Whole code rests on the authority (and holiness) of God, not a king
- No division between civil and religious laws (ANE mostly legal - civil), showing God's concern for life as a whole
- One law for all, no matter one's particular status. Special regulations protect the weak and the helpless. More humane than other ANE law codes. (Hammurabi's Code allowed 10 varieties of bodily mutilation as punishment; death for robbery; sliding scale of punishment dependent upon class position, no emancipation of slaves, etc.)

- High view of human life demonstrated by fixed, limited penalties, eye for eye. Even today, laws in some countries may not uphold human life as something that is valuable to preserve and protect.

The Law looks forward to settled agricultural life in Promised Land, not the nomadic 40 years, with many regulations dealing with issues that can only arise once the people have entered the Promised Land.

There are actually five great legal collections (all considered Mosaic by Jewish tradition) incorporated into the Pentateuch. These are:

1. The Decalogue or as we call it, the 10 commandments. Ex 20:1-17
2. The Book of the Covenant Ex 21-23
3. The Priestly Code, Ex 25-Num 10
4. The Holiness Code, Lev 17-26
5. The Deuteronomic Code, Dt. 12-26

10 Commandments

What is the focus of the 10 Commandments? Love of God and Love of Neighbor, just as Jesus so clearly points out when He is asked what is the most important "commandment" (Mt 22:37-40). So:

- Commands 1-4: Regulate actions and attitudes toward God
- Commands 5-10: Regulate actions and attitudes toward fellow humans.

These are called "words" in Exodus and Dt. 10:4 rather than laws as they are more like 10 principles for moral living than laws. It is in the rest of the Law Code that they are spelled out in more detail as actual laws. As H.L. Ellison stated, "... the 10 Commandments contain a statement of the great basic principles of character that must exist if a man wishes to be in fellowship with God; all the rest is commentary and a guide towards the creation of this character."

**** Small Group Activity: The 10 Commandments**

As the groups share their insights, be sure to point out details on the following commandments:

3rd "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" is not just about swearing but about misusing the Lord's name for incantations or in magical ways to try to manipulate God and His power.

4th "Remember the Sabbath day" is done in commemoration of God's initial act of creation according to Exod 20:11 but is done in commemoration of God's second great act of creating the nation of Israel by bringing Israel out of Egyptian bondage in Deut 5:15. Both are important acts of creation!

#3: TABERNACLE represented the process by which a sinful people could maintain fellowship with a holy, transcendent, infinite God. It signified His presence among them and the sacrifices made it possible for Him to be present among this sinful people. The word tabernacle means "dwelling place." NOTE: HOLY PLACE

Symbolism of the tabernacle as it pertains to Christ: **SEE DIAGRAM**
Its construction is according to a heavenly model. Heb 9:11, 23-24

- 1) Opening to outside is on the east, just as the entrance to Eden which is guarded by the angels is on the east.
- 2) Altar for burnt offerings outside in outer courtyard. Very large- 7 and ½ ft long and wide. Burnt offerings made here. Indicates every approach to God requires a blood sacrifice, as all animals were first bled before being burnt. This speaks of the necessity of atonement as a prerequisite for fellowship with God. The penalty for sin must be paid and the sinner pardoned. Christ is our perfect sacrifice.
- 3) Basin for washing between altar and entrance to Holy Place. Priests required to wash hands and feet every time they entered. Guilt of sin removed by burnt offering, then defilement of sin removed by washing. We need to be washed and renewed on a regular basis.
- 4) Golden Lampstand in Holy Place. Seven branched candlestick called menorah, to give light in the otherwise dark Holy Place. Christ called Himself the light of the world, also in Rev there were 7 lampstands to represent the 7 churches, as we reflect the light of Christ into the world. The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual illumination.
- 5) Table of Showbread – in Holy Place. Loaves of bread representing ea of 12 tribes as thank offerings to God for his provision for the people. Tho J used manna of wanderings to describe himself as the bread of life, the showbread takes on new meaning when we recognize the communion bread J offered during the last supper. Spiritual sustenance comes by communing with God. Dt 8:3: "...man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."
- 6) Altar of incense in Holy Place. Located just before the entrance to Holy of Holies. In OT, incense carried protective powers in the midst of the dangerous divine presence – to protect the priest and/or the people from the wrath of God (He would not see them) or so that they would not "see" God, since this was considered life-threatening. In NT, said to represent the prayers of the saints (Rev 5:8), which actually fits the fact that it allows us to safely be in the presence of the all-powerful God. Before our prayers can be heard by God, we must have first entered by the blood of Christ (the sacrifice) and be cleansed from our sins.

- 7) Curtain between Holy of Holies and Holy Place. God could not be approached directly by sinful people, except by High Priest only once each year on the Day of Atonement and only during and after a proper process of atonement took place. At the death of Christ, our perfect sacrifice, the curtain was torn in two, indicating all could now enter the presence of God through Christ.
- 8) Holy of Holies was a perfect cube, symbolizing the perfection of God in this location that spoke of the presence of God. For the Israelites, only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, but we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place (another name for the Holy of Holies) by the blood of Jesus through the veil, which is His flesh (Heb 10:19-20).
- 9) Ark. God dwelled symbolically between the wings of the cherubim above the cover of the ark. The ark contained three items: the tablets of the 10 Commandments, Aaron's rod that blossomed, and the jar of manna, to remind the people of God's guidance, authority, and provision. Overall, it represented the covenant God kept with His people. On the Day of Atonement, blood would be sprinkled on the mercy seat (the lid of the ark) and the sins of the people would be forgiven for that year. Through Jesus' one-time offering of blood, our sins are forgiven! The ark was the only item in Holy of Holies.

#4: PRIESTHOOD

Described in Exodus with regard to the tabernacle, more will be presented in subsequent books of the Pentateuch. The priest represents the people before God – he offers prayers, praise, and gifts on behalf of the people. He also mediates God's forgiveness and blessing to the people. To a certain extent the priests typified Israel's role in the world. Israel channeled blessing to the world by bearing witness to the one and true God, and it was through Israel that the nations would be blessed. NOTE: HOLY PEOPLE

√ **Themes of Exodus**

Deliverance (ch 1-18) – through plagues, Passover, and through the Red Sea (Sea of Reeds in Hebrew) God revealed Himself to the people as sovereign and powerful.

The miracle at the Sea of Reeds and the exodus from Egypt, God's deliverance of the people from bondage, became the primary symbol of salvation and the central act of redemption in the OT. To this day, Jews understand the exodus event in this way.

Covenant (ch. 19-40) – The Abrahamic covenant anticipated the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. The promises made to Abraham are partially

fulfilled here and continued into the future (19:4-5). The Laws gave guidance to the people as to God's expectation of holiness among them, as well as guiding them as to what was best, most healthful physically, emotionally, and relationally with those around them. Obeying God's laws is the right response to God's grace and salvation, not as the means of salvation (already given in the release of the captives).

Presence of God – seen throughout the book. God desires to be a presence among His people. The coming of God's glorious presence into the newly constructed tabernacle forms the climax of the book of Exodus. (Arnold 113)

What lessons are to be learned and applied for today?

- Too often we do not wait upon the Lord to deliver us, but fall into fear or try to deliver ourselves (14:13)
- Too often we grumble/complain at God about our circumstances – Exodus and Numbers reveals the sinfulness of this (16:8)
- How our sins hurt God and put a distance between Him and us, for He is holy and pure, and cannot be present where sin is (the reason for sacrifice)

**** Discussion: Pre-course reading assignment**

Exodus chapters 1-3, 12:21-32; chapters 19, 20, and 32

Lesson 12

LEVITICUS

Whereas Exodus ended by emphasizing where to worship God (the tabernacle), Leviticus deals with how to worship our holy God.

√ **The name - Leviticus**

Its Name comes from the Latin Vulgate, which took it from the Greek "the book pertaining to the Levites" so you know right away it is about Levi's tribe, the priests, and their duties. Hebrew is "and he (the LORD) called" which spotlights God's authority and initiative in issuing rules for acceptable worship. Leviticus is a further elaboration on the process of nation building and covenant making and can be summarized as "Sinai Revelation." That revelation deals with holiness: how a holy God provides for His people to be holy so that He may have relationship with them.

√ **Six Divisions**

6 divisions: (LaSor 82)

- 1. Regulations for making sacrifices (sacrificial system) 1-7
- 2. Descriptions of ordination of Aaron and sons and first sacrifices in Tent of Meeting (inaugural service) 8-10
- 3. Laws regulating ritual purity (laws of impurities) 11-15
- 4. Liturgy and calendar for Day of Atonement 16
- 5. Laws with exhortations to holy living (laws of holiness) 17-26
- 6. Laws on valuation, particularly for tithes and offerings 27

Section 1: (LaSor 82) There are two types of sacrifices: a) those which offer a soothing aroma to LORD (whole burnt , grain, well-being or peace) and could be presented as the worshiper desired, and b) those that provide expiation and forgiveness (sin/purification or guilt/reparation offering) required of those who had need of restoration of relationship. Both of the latter were unintentional or ignorant failures to keep the commandments. Sins done with premeditation and forethought were for the most part beyond the power of the sacrificial system to expiate. One interpretation by later rabbinic writings is that a premeditated sin could be reduced to an inadvertent sin through repentance, and then could have appropriate reparation sacrifice made to expiate the sin. These sacrifices anticipated the death of Christ on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for all humanity.

Other ANE cultures also used sacrifice, sometimes with the same terms. These sacrifices were designed to provide fellowship with the deity, to appease a god, and to insure continuance of divine favor, factors present in Israel's sacrifices as well. How was Israel's sacrificial system different from those of their neighbors, who also offered sacrifices?

- Israel's absolute monotheism with sacrifices as direct revelation from Him. This was part and parcel of the covenantal relationship with God, as the sacrifices were the means by which an unclean and unholy people could be in relationship with a clean, pure and holy God.
- Emphasis on ethics and morality stemmed from God's own absolute moral holiness – rarely seen elsewhere. ANE neighbors had no such concept in their belief system.
- Complete absence and actual prohibition of associated practices used elsewhere, such as magic or sorcery. Mesopotamian culture commonly used the sacrificial animal as a means of clairvoyance, in order to discern the future actions of the gods, by reading the dead animal's entrails. This practice was completely absent in Israel.
- High tone of the sacrificial system- no frenzy, prostitution, orgies, fertility rites, human sacrifice, etc.

Section 2: (LaSor 86) Moses led an elaborate ordination ceremony, then the priests remained at the sanctuary for a week, after which time the first sacrifices were offered. Aaron's sons offered a "strange" fire that had not been authorized by the Lord (10:1). This could have been a pagan rite or seeking to enter the Holy of Holies reserved only for High Priest; the text is not clear on its content. God is often harshest at an inauguration in order to highlight the severity of the offense—similar to Ananias and Sapphira in Acts Ch. 5.

Section 3: (LaSor 87) Ritual purity. Since God is holy, it is crucial that His people prepare themselves properly in order to enter His presence. These laws **separated Israel from worship practices and customs of their neighbors**, particular laws against witchcraft, certain sacrifices, and food laws. Observing them **promoted solidarity among Israelites and encouraged their spiritual development**. Clean and unclean become symbols for moral purity and impurity. It was **a daily reminder** of being separated for God and of His purity in all things.

We can organize these various laws of uncleanness into 5 basic categories:

1. Contact with a corpse
2. Contagious skin diseases
3. Processes connected with sex and reproduction
4. Consumption of a forbidden food
5. Physical impairments

When one became unclean, one was unfit to worship Yahweh. It was a recurring experience for every Israelite, since death and sexual activity is part of life. Uncleanliness did not mean that one was guilty of sin – only that one lacked ritual purity. Steps were thus provided to return one to ritual purity.

Food laws not only set Israel apart from surrounding peoples and their worship practices, but also had a **sound basis in avoidance of sickness**. People couldn't eat:

- Carnivorous animals, which readily transmitted infection in a warm climate where flesh decayed rapidly
- Pork – hosts to various parasites, including Trichinosis, which are very dangerous to humans.
- Vermin and predatory birds – likely disease-carriers, since their beaks and claws can carry heavy doses of infectious bacteria.
- Shellfish – can cause food-poisoning and enteritis if not handled well.

Also, prevention of contamination of food and water supplies by dead animals and quarantine regulations regarding acute skin diseases very healthful – earliest quarantine regulations and preventive medicine known in ANE are found here. Note how often washing is recommended throughout this section – this is great hygiene! These were also reminders of separation from impurity in order to be pure and holy before God. Jesus ended these general food laws by calling his followers to a purity not of dress or diet but of the heart.

Section 4: (LaSor 88-89) Day of Atonement once each year was an extremely important day. It was the only time the high priest (or anyone) entered the Holy of Holies. The high priest sprinkled blood on the mercy seat twice, first to make atonement for himself (a bull), then for the congregation (a goat). These sacrifices cleansed the Holy of Holies and Tent of Meeting of defilement by human sins. It is only on the Day of Atonement that the blood of the purification offering is brought all the way into the Holy of Holies. Consequently, the Day of Atonement is the one occasion in which all the sins and impurities of the community of Israel are fully purged.

A threefold progression can clearly be seen in the bloodrite on this day. As summarized in Lev 16:20, the priest purifies first the Holy of Holies in the Holy Place, then the tent of meeting and then the outer altar in succession. The purpose of this great purgation is to cleanse the sanctuary of all sins and impurities so that God's presence will not abandon the sanctuary and therefore the people. This made possible His continued presence among His people, since God cannot abide impurity. Then the Scapegoat is used to carry away the sins of the congregation into the wilderness (like Jesus taking on all the sins of the people – Heb 7:27; 9:7,12). At Jesus' death, the way

became permanently opened for all believers to enter the presence of God directly and personally for themselves.

Section 5: (LaSor 89-90) Holiness Code. The variety of topics in this section is broad. Here Israel is called to be holy as God is holy (19:2); loving, ethical behavior towards others is at the heart of this holy living (19:18). God is Lord of time as well as of place and moral life – hence three times per year all Israelites were to present themselves to the Lord – Feast of Passover followed immediately by Feast of Unleavened Bread (celebrating deliverance), Feast of Weeks 50 days later (first fruits of the wheat harvest), and in the autumn, the Feast of Booths/ Tabernacles (wonderings in the wilderness and end of the harvest season). Regulations for the Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee are also included in this section (ch. 25). These can be reminders to us today of how our lives are to be in union with what is right and holy all the time.

√ **Genre of Law**

Law dominates the last 4 books of Pentateuch. Types of legal material:

1. **Casuistic law** (case law). Its distinctive “if...then” structure and impersonal third person style make it easily recognizable. Read Ex 21:18-19 Israelite casuistic law resembles ANE law. It primarily deals with civil or criminal cases rather than religious ones.
2. **Apodictic law** (absolute law). Unconditional directives; absolute orders about right and wrong without exception. Can be a positive command which is an admonition (Honor your father and your mother) or negative command which is a prohibition (Thou shalt not murder). Often listed in the OT in a series of similar laws.
3. **Legal instruction**. Two forms: **priestly** instruction aims to instruct priests in professional matters such as ritual procedures. The other is **ritual** instruction for lay people about how to perform rituals properly.

**** Activity: Law Practice**

Discern the difference between casuistic and apodictic laws, as well as moral, civil and ritual laws.

Let's sum up. What is God's purpose in giving the chosen people all these laws?

- 1) Reveal His glory among the people and His character – He is a holy God. He could not be present where sin was present (Dt 23:14), so He gave them a way to cleanse themselves from sin and defilement

- 2) Mark Israel as a chosen and separated (holy) people from those around them, both to avoid their problems (spiritual, physical, etc.), a negative, and draw others to God, a positive.
- 3) Give Israel a standard for godly living so they might inherit the land and enjoy its blessings, hence spiritual development and holiness for the people
- 4) Reveal human sinfulness (Rom 7:7-8)
- 5) And thus prepare Israel, and all who have faith, for the coming of Christ (Gal 3:24)

Principles of interpretation

So how do we interpret all these laws and codes for Christians today?

- 1) Some laws retain literal validity for Christians. (Love the Lord with all your heart...) These laws are **equal** to their meanings in the OT
- 2) In some cases, the NT makes the OT law **more strict**. (OT permits divorce and remarriage Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18; 24:1-4 // Jesus permits divorce only when marital infidelity had occurred (Mt 19:9) and Paul in case of desertion by an unbeliever
- 3) Some laws are **no longer valid** or have literal validity because of NT teachings (their fulfillment in Christ). We no longer follow the OT sacrificial system, food laws, or requirement of circumcision.
- 4) But laws no longer literally valid may still teach **timeless truths and principles** (sacrifice shows seriousness of sin in eyes of God, food laws remind us that we are to be a separate people for God, pure and clean, and circumcision should be of our hearts though no longer required of our bodies).
- 5) It is good to understand the covenant nature of these laws – God was giving them in order to establish a covenant relationship between Himself and His people. We have been given a new covenant through Christ that is based upon the old one, sometimes clarifying it, sometimes replacing it with a more perfect way, sometimes continuing it just as it is.

**** Small Group Activity: Old Testament Laws**

Each group can explore a different kind of law and compare/contrast how that law is handled in the NT, then decide how we are to apply that law to our lives today.

√ **Lessons from Leviticus**

What lessons do we glean from Leviticus? (LaSor 91)

- **God is holy.** His name and His being are holy and cannot be in contact with that which is not holy. Other things are holy as they are

in relationship with God. The laws of purity ordered the daily lives of Israelites and kept them conscious of the holy. They separated them as a people from others.

- **Backbone of holiness was justice** – it established equity among all people, both Israel and strangers. Remember how different this was than the law codes and understandings of ANE.
- **Sin and sacrifice.** Since humans sin, fellowship with God (which was basic to the covenant) required a means of access to God. This was the purpose of the sacrificial system, indicating the seriousness of sin by death of an animal (its blood being its life). Every form of life is a precious gift from God. God is saying that life itself (this most precious gift) must be returned to Him for the purpose of atoning for sin. The animal gave its life for the person who sinned. If the sacrifice was presented properly with a repentant heart, then the result was forgiveness, but it was NOT a magical formula. The presenter relied on the mercy of Yahweh for acceptance of the offering and forgiveness. NT makes it clear that Christ is the perfect sacrifice – His life made a one-time atonement for the sins of all who respond in faith, relying on the mercy of God (Heb 9:26; 1 Jn 2:1-2; 1 Pt 3:18).

Without Leviticus we would not understand what Christ accomplished on the cross!!

√ **Holiness and how it applies to life today**

The Holiness of God and His People

The Hebraic concept of holiness derives from and is defined by the holiness of God Himself. This character aspect of God is perhaps the most important one in the Old Testament. It contains two elements: being separated/set apart and being complete/whole/perfect/pure. We as Nazarenes preaching holiness can find much that is of value in this book!

Holiness of separation

God's separateness is his unqualified uniqueness. There is no other God. He is other than His creation and should not be confused with it. He is other than the pantheon of deities which are all man-made and creations themselves. He is other than humanity, even though humanity so often strives to be Him rather than reflect Him. God's completeness and perfection is unqualified as well. There is no blemish in God. He is pure and whole beyond any human understanding. Because of these aspects of His holiness, God does not allow the worship of anything or anyone other than Himself.

Divine holiness does not automatically transmit itself to humanity, however. Yet God wants us to be holy as He is holy and provides the means to

accomplish this on a human level. He surrounded the Israelites with reminders of His holiness that would aid in their understanding of Him and their development as His holy people.

The separateness of holiness took on various aspects and forms. Separateness in relation to a certain space was clearly presented in the tabernacle. (LaSor 94) There is a spatial progression as we move from wilderness to outside camp to inside camp to sanctuary then inner court, Holy Place and Holy of Holies, approaching the presence of God physically. Also persons, moving from unclean spirits to those who are temporarily unclean, to the average person, to Levites to priests to high priest. Only the holiest person, the high priest, was able to enter the Holy of Holies, and that only once each year. It was important to God that those who drew near to Him in this way would be holy as He was holy (Lev. 10).

Even the holy objects used in the tabernacle must be set apart and handled only by specific people, or death would result (Num. 4). People such as Nazirites could be separated for special service to the Lord (Num. 6). Temporal (time) separation was illustrated in the Sabbath each week, the Sabbath year, the festivals and ceremonial days, times considered holy by the Lord. Sexual separation was exhibited by laws against abnormal sexual behavior and admonitions not to marry into other cultures. Morality was also a means of separation through the laws and commandments that set apart the Israelites from those cultures around them. Food and dietary laws kept the Israelites distinct and separate from any non-Israelites.

Holiness of wholeness and purity

In the same way, the holiness of perfection, wholeness, and completeness surrounded the Israelites in their daily activities. The priests were expected themselves to be whole, pure, and clean. Lev. 21 commands that all descendents of Aaron who would serve as priests must be whole, complete, and without blemish or defect. The animals used in sacrifice likewise must be without blemish (Lev. 22). Anyone unclean or impure was sent outside the camp so that he/she would not defile the rest of the congregation (Lev. 13) until declared healed by priest (see Miriam's leprosy Num 12). The sacrificial system was given as a method to return a person from uncleanness/ impurity/ incompleteness to wholeness and purity before the Lord.

By these various ways, God surrounded the Israelites daily with reminders of his own holiness and their need to be holy so that He could reside in their presence. In like manner, this would reveal the holiness of God to other peoples and cultures with whom the Israelites came into contact. God did not do this in order to exclude others from worship and knowledge of Him, but to reveal the difference of this God over all others and to draw them to Him, that they might know Him as well.

Modernism

Western Christianity's individualism has difficulty understanding why a holy God would call an entire people – a nation – to be holy as he is holy. Why did the Israelites need a Day of Atonement (Lev 16)? What was necessary about the whole nation repenting and seeking forgiveness once each year? Yet this concept of corporate holiness is carried into the New Testament as the body of Christ. We are admonished to grow up as a body into completeness and wholeness (Eph. 4). Western individuals often do not understand the importance of corporate unity and wholeness, believing that individual faith is all that matters. We have much to learn from Africa, where community is of such importance!

African society may emphasize identity through tribal or secret society. A holy God who demands total loyalty and obedience even above family or tribal loyalties seems harsh and unreasonable to people whose only identity and memorial is their children or their tribal allegiances. It is not until they can find their identity in Christ that they will obtain a true memorial for all time. It is only through such devotion and priority as we see in the life of Abraham that we can hope to come into the holy presence of God.

Post-modernism

Finally, Christians and secular people alike can fall into the trap of seeking a loving God and ignoring those aspects of his holiness that do not seem very loving, His justice and His righteousness. We tend to gravitate toward 1 John (God is love) and are repelled by the stories in the Old Testament that reveal judgment and justice. The holy wars when children and women are wiped out along with the men, those times when God kills someone for looking at Him wrong (e.g., the sons of Aaron in Lev. 10), do not seem to fit a God of love, grace, and mercy. We begin to think there must be two gods just as there are two testaments. Some Christian churches go so far as to rarely preach or teach out of the Old Testament, so as to avoid this scandal.

But to understand God's love for us, we must understand His holiness as well. It is vital to the total and full reality of a sacred God that we recognize all of Him, not just bits and pieces. We may not always find ourselves comfortable with what we see, but we can always be assured of His justice, His grace, and His faithfulness. This is a true relationship of love, not one based on human definitions. Our trust must reside in a God who is both holy and loving, or we have blinded ourselves to His true reality.

**** Discussion: Pre-course reading assignment**

Leviticus 9:7-10:11 (first priestly acts by Aaron and sons); chapters 16 and 23; 25:1-28

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Lesson 13

NUMBERS

✓ **The name - Numbers**

The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible named the book Numbers because of its census lists, but the Hebrew Bible uses the words in the first verse, "In the wilderness." Numbers could be called "Guidance in the Wilderness." It covers the 38 years and 9 months from encounter with God at Mt. Sinai to the preparations in Moab to enter the Promised Land. The journey, if taking a direct route, would only take about a week or so, but the narrative states that 38 years was punishment for lack of faith (Num 14:20-45), so that almost none of the unbelieving generation was allowed to enter the land.

✓ **3 Divisions**

- 1) Events around Sinai 1:1-12:16
- 2) Events around Kadesh 13:1-22:1
- 3) Events at Moab 22:2-36:13

**** Activity: Sinai Wanderings map**

✓ **Genre**

The first section contained more law, directions and guidance as preparation for the journey to the Promised Land. The second and third sections are narrative, relating the failure of the Israelites to trust God while wandering in the desert and then their preparations for entering the Promised Land while on the plains of Moab, interspersed with additional laws.

√ Important events

Chapter

- 11 Quail and plague
- 12 Murmuring of Miriam and Aaron, wanting to be the leaders
- 13 Spies sent into the Promised Land
- 14 The Great Failure – only Joshua and Caleb had faith
- 16 Rebellion of Korah and group – wanting to be the leaders (earth opened and swallowed them/fire consumed others). Aaron intercedes.
- 17 Aaron's rod buds to prove God's choice of him
- 20 Waters of Meribah – Moses' failure and disobedience – Moses' actions were comparable to the people's rebellion when they refused to enter the Promised Land.
- 21 The Bronze Serpent – Jesus lifted up (Jn. 3:14-15)
- 23 Balaam's efforts to curse Israel and the talking donkey
- 25 Baal of Peor - Phinehas' zeal against Israelite and Midianite woman
Sexual liaison = religious apostasy. Canaanite Baal worship would continue to plague the Israelites for generations to come.

√ The message

Throughout Numbers, the message is the faithfulness of Yahweh in the face of Israel's rebellion and the dire consequences attached to covenant disobedience. Israel repeatedly breaks its covenant with Yahweh, but thanks to the covenant mechanism put in place through the tabernacle and the sacrificial system, there is now a way to reconnect and reestablish relationship with God.

√ Major themes

- 1) **Census numbers.** (LaSor 103-106) Enrollment of peoples was administrative procedure common to ANE. This census, taken twice in Numbers, had three purposes: recognizing manpower for war, allotment of work assignments, and a basis for taxation.
- 2) **God's presence and provision.** (LaSor 107) God could be seen by day or by night (9:15) in a very real way protecting the people from the

hot sun by day and the cold desert air by night. God provided for the people in three ways during this time: 1) through direct guidance, physical protection, and material supplies, 2) instructions in God's law and 3) institution of effective patterns of leadership (Moses often, Aaron with budding staff ch 17, Joshua with the spies, intercession with God by both Moses and Aaron).

- 3) **The people's grumbling and rebellion.** Even when the Lord sends them their own grumbling request for meat, they grumble about what he sends. When He leads them up to the Promised Land, they refuse to enter, thus necessitating a total of 40 years in the wilderness to prepare the next generation to enter the land. Miriam and Aaron rebels against Moses' leadership (ch. 12) while Korah rebels against Aaron's leadership (ch. 16), Moses rebels against God's directions (ch. 20), the people rebel with Baal of Peor (ch. 25). The wilderness of Numbers is a place of testing and sadly, most often the people fail their test.

The response by Moses to God's anger is to intercede for the people again and again (as he did with the golden calf in Exodus, Aaron with incense after Korah's rebellion (16:41f), Moses with the bronze serpent (21:6f)). If God had not put into place a method of reinstatement for the people, there would have been no hope for them at all! Certainly God felt that particular generation was not ready for the Promised Land.

In particular, references to events in Numbers are used in 1 Cor 10 and Heb 3-4 to warn NT Christians that they too may fall into sin and disobedience even though they have experienced freedom and deliverance through Christ.

- 4) **Yahweh and the nations.** (LaSor 109) The story of Balak and Balaam with the talking donkey shows God's sovereign control over the nations as well as His ability to protect Israel. Balaam, a pagan prophet brought in by Moabite King Balak to curse Israel, is unable to curse Israel but only bless it, while he curses the nations of Moab, Edom, and Amalek.

✓ **God's People in the Wilderness**

Wilderness has meant many things to many people through the centuries. It has often meant a place of great hardship, where the basic necessities of life do not come easily, the sun scorches and the wind irritates. It can be a place of great evil and danger, where scorpions and serpents, spirits and demons await their hapless victims. For early Christians in particular, it was a place of refuge and escape from persecution. When persecution no longer threatened, it became a hidden refuge for great minds seeking spiritual

formation. Uncluttered by human civilization, the closeness to life and death in wilderness seemed to bring one closer to the source of life and death, God Himself.

To a people who had been living for 400 years in a highly advanced, cosmopolitan civilization, the desert must have indeed seemed dangerous and foreboding. The ease of food, shelter, and labor (even if forced at times) gave them a false sense of security. Now here was this strange man stating that this strange God wanted them to worship Him out there in the wilderness. Is he crazy? Surely we will die there. But the thought of freedom from slavery moved them to follow.

From the time of their leaving Egypt until they enter the Promised Land 40 years later, the Hebrew people are in the wilderness. The subthemes of wilderness as journey, wilderness as a place of covenant, and wilderness as a place of testing will be studied to determine how the people's wanderings are depicted in the book of Numbers.

Wilderness as journey is understood as both geographical/physical and spiritual. This journey has both a beginning and an end. 40 specific sites are listed to represent the 40 years of wandering. But the spiritual journey during those years is vital to this diverse group God has chosen to shape into His people. Temptations surround them. The temptation to stop and go no further is real to the people. What is worse, however, is the temptation not only to stop, but to turn around and go back to Egypt. Their fear of this wilderness combines with their lack of faith and trust in their divine and human leadership, until the people decide that that is precisely what they want to do. Numbers 14 tells of the rebellion of the people against God's plan and His promise. He is ready to give them the Promised Land; they refuse it and Him. Their only desire is to return to the security of Egypt. They are willing to be slaves (after all, nostalgia has limited memory) rather than risk freedom with this strange God. For 38 more years God must allow this people to wander in the wilderness in order to prepare and mold the next generation into a people who will accept His plan and His purpose for them. There is very little positive and much that is negative about that first generation of Israelites and their journey.

Wilderness as a place of covenant is begun in Exodus at Mt. Sinai, where the people first receive the covenant and first break it. The beginning of Numbers finds them still present at Mt. Sinai, from where they move out toward the Promised Land. The character of God is revealed through His covenant. It is His desire to come into relationship with this people, to make them His holy nation. His grace and mercy is exhibited as He forgives them their rebellious, fear-filled actions throughout the course of the wilderness wandering. Covenant reveals the faithful, compassionate aspects of God that

are positive indeed. But it also reveals the wayward hearts of men. Over and over again, the people break this covenant into which they have freely entered. They refuse to obey His direction to enter the Land (ch. 14). They turn to idolatry with Baal of Peor (ch. 25). They flagrantly violate His laws and His statutes. Nothing is left but the hope that the next generation will be more faithful to this covenanting God.

Wilderness becomes a tremendous **place of testing**. Is this people ready to be a holy nation? Or must they be honed and disciplined further? Their complaining and quarrelsome behaviour show the underlying lack of trust in God's plan and leadership. The people complain about adversity and lack of meat while Moses complains of the burden of leadership (ch. 11). Aaron and Miriam complain of Moses' leadership role (ch. 12). The spies are tested in their trust of God's plan to enter the Promised Land and spread their fears to the entire congregation (ch. 13, 14). Korah and his group of Levites are tested in their loyalty to Moses as leader and Aaron as priest (ch. 16). Even Moses himself is tested at the rock at Meribah and is found wanting (ch. 20). The evil of the Israelites is brought to an all-time low by their actions at Peor (ch. 25). So many are tested and fail miserably! There seems to be so little faith and trust among this stiff-necked people. Certainly the negative aspects of sin, evil, rebellion, and unbelief is displayed repeatedly throughout this section of Numbers.

But there is more than one story and more than one history being played out before our eyes. The people have a **choice to make between two histories**. One is the history that so many of them have chosen. It is the history of wilderness as a place of unbearable abandonment and fear, a place of danger and death. An entire generation of Israelites hold tightly to this history and refuse to let go.

There is **another wilderness history** as well. It is the history of hope and trust in the Lord, a history of promise that brings life, not death, a history based on faith in God. Moses grasps that history and exemplifies it to the people. Though he fails at one point, he shines at so many others. His is the positive leadership and devotion that will finally and safely move this stiff-necked people into the land of milk and honey. His is the intercessory heart which prevents the destruction of so many, time and time again. Others begin to understand and embrace this history as well. Joshua and Caleb testify to it when they take a stand against the rebellious congregation in ch. 14. Aaron seems to have released his hold on the old history after his and Miriam's rebellion, quietly moving into a position which will allow God's blessings rather than his curses. The next generation is the one which will inherit the land and enter into this history of promise as a people. The wilderness becomes a positive place for these.

Yet **the most positive depiction** of all in the book of Numbers is the depiction of God. Through His provision, presence, and patience, He is the faithful one after whom all other faithfulness pales in comparison. He provides the physical necessities, protection from enemies, systems of worship and atonement, strong leadership roles and a successor for Moses. His presence is known daily by the people in the column of cloud and fire. His presence also appears more directly to aid His leaders and carry out His plan (e.g., ch. 12 & 14). His patience with this stiff-necked people is amazing indeed. Though they rebel, He will forgive. Though they reject, He will accept them again.

Numbers reveals to us a covenant-making God who will place Himself fully and completely at the disposal of His people. It speaks to us of His faithfulness when we are not, His desire for us when we turn away. May we be thankful indeed that He is our Lord and our God.

√ **Lessons and application**

What lessons do we see here?

God can even make a donkey speak wisdom if He needs to! So we should never be surprised by the messenger God chooses to use.

Grumbling and discontent is a form of rebellion. There are grave consequences when we do not trust God to provide for and protect us.

**** Discussion: Pre-course reading assignment:**

Numbers chapters 11-14; 20:1-21:9

DEUTERONOMY

✓ **The name - Deuteronomy**

Its Name. This is the record of Moses' farewell addresses to Israel, given just before their entrance into the Promised Land on the plains of Moab. Hebrew recognizes this by giving it the name from the first sentence of the book, "words". LXX means "second law book" or "second telling of the law", which acknowledges its ties with Exodus, where the law first occurs in the Pentateuch.

✓ **The setting**

The setting of the book of Deuteronomy is "the Plains of Moab," across the Jordan River from the Promised Land. The people of Israel are camped across the Jordan anticipating crossing the river to enter the Promised Land. Deuteronomy depicts Moses preaching the book of Deuteronomy as a sermon with the purpose of preparing the children of Israel for life in the Promised Land. Laws recorded in Ex, Lev, and Num are brought together and applied specifically to settled life in Canaan which is about to begin.

Moses gives three lengthy speeches (begins at 1:6/4:44/29:1). The second address is much longer than the other two and is the heart of the book, the other two are frames to introduce it and describe its consequences. The middle and longest unit seems to contain a bewildering arrangement of the laws. But literary studies have recently discerned a pattern in which the laws of this unit are based on the 10 Commandments in ch. 5, hence it is an expanded Decalogue. These laws in chs. 12-26 are arranged under four major issues that the 10 Commandments address.

✓ **The message**

The message of Deuteronomy serves to communicate the following to the children of Israel:

- Reminder of what God has done to bring them here; His miracles and how He has cared for them through the wilderness.
- Reminder of the covenant and God's statutes.
- Warnings regarding disobedience and avoiding the paganism of the inhabitants of new land.
- Obedience brings blessing while disobedience brings punishment!

✓ Major characteristics

The following are considered **major characteristics** of the book of Deuteronomy:

- **Semantic style:** Long speeches of exhortation and warning.
- **The Word of God is spoken through a leader** (such as Moses or Joshua).
- **Exhortations:** To obey God's laws with the promise of blessing (6:1-3,10-11; 7:12-15).
- **Warnings:** To disobey God's law will result in punishment (6:12-15; 8:11,19-20).
- **Centralization of worship:** In the one place where God chooses (DEUT. 12:1-7).
- **Theme of the land:** Obedience will result in the prosperity of the land, and disobedience will result in the loss of the land and exile (3:18; 4:1; 8:1,7-10; 11:8-17).

✓ Purpose

Why was it written? (God's purpose)

- 1) **New generation** – the next generation needed to hear the story and make their commitment to God
- 2) People would be facing **new challenges** of a different kind, now that they were entering a **new land**, the Promised Land – they would need a central place of worship, as an example
- 3) Under **new leadership**, Joshua instead of Moses
- 4) **New temptations** before them (not to give in to local idolatrous religions), different than the wilderness (return to Egypt)
- 5) **New, deeper message** – “love God with all your heart,…” Love used 21 times in Dt with regard to the relationship between God and human beings.

✓ Suzerain-vassal treaty

Deuteronomy follows the outline of a suzerain-vassal treaty of ANE, forms of which have been found this century, but the length of Deuteronomy far exceeds any of those treaties which have been found.

Deuteronomy

- 1) Introduction 1:1-5
- 2) Historical prologue 1:6-4:49
- 3) Stipulations 5:1-26:19

ANE (particularly Hittite of 2nd millennium)

- Preamble** naming author of treaty
- Historical prologue** sets out relations between parties
- Stipulations** explaining mutual responsibilities of parties

Document clause describing treaty and arranging for vassal to read it at regular intervals

List of gods witnessing treaty (not needed with Yahweh)

- 4) Curses and blessings 27:1-30:20 **Curses and blessings** threatening the vassal with illness, deportation, etc. if breaks treaty, but promising prosperity/blessing if faithful
- 5) Succession arrangements and public reading 31:1-34:5

✓ **Highlights and contributions**

What are the highlights and contributions of Dt? (LaSor 118-125)

- 1) **Creed of Israel called the Shema** of 6:4-9, "Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the Lord is one. You shall **love** the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." This begins an entire section of important teaching regarding the passing on to next generation of one's knowledge about and devotion to God.
- 2) **God who acts.** Though seen throughout Pentateuch, this is specifically spelled out by Moses over and over again. He admonishes the people not to forget what God has done for them.

Heilsgeschichte – history of **salvation** – God entering into the history of the world is presented in unique way in Dt that would influence the later historical writings greatly. The ideas of (1) a central location for worship and of (2) blessings with occupation of the land vs. curses with loss of the land become the basis for the following historical narratives in the Bible. In the Latter Prophets, these ideas are applied to the future, in that the people will be sent into exile for their disobedience, away from temple and from land. These concepts sustain the people while they are in exile, when they otherwise feel helpless. There will be a remnant that will return to the land. They are constantly being called to remember what God has done for them, how He has promised them blessing if they will only be obedient, and that a future is planned for them.

- 3) **Election of Israel** becomes the pervasive idea in Dt. God has chosen them, and this is foundational to Moses' entire speech. Does this mean indifference of God to other peoples? No, He wants Israel to transmit God's truth to other peoples, so that all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3). In order to do so, the people must obey God. One way they were to cling to their God and obey Him was to maintain **a single sanctuary** (12:1-14). The elect must refuse to worship at any place where other gods and idols were worshiped, but only at the

single place God would choose for them – first Ebal, then Shechem, Shiloh and finally Jerusalem. When the kingdoms divided after David and Solomon, one of the first acts of the northern king was to set up two new shrines to God without God’s approval, the beginning of the end for the Northern Kingdom.

- 4) **Covenant relationship based on love** is so important. God is not trying to maintain equal responsibility on both sides as in a contract of equal partners (His responsibility is always greater) nor does He establish His right to covenant through conquest (as in suzerain-vassal treaty), as was customary in ANE. His covenant is based **on love** (7:8 “because the LORD loved you...”) and on His own faithfulness so even if the other side fails in its obligations, God will not break the covenant. Nowhere else in the Pentateuch is this underlying principle of the law of love so clearly stated. The basis of the nation’s relationship to God flowed from His love for them and from their appropriate response of obedience. When God’s people break His commandments, they break the relationship of love (Mt. 22:35-40; Jn 14:15). Obedience to God’s law is a byproduct of a relationship of love. Love is the essence of the relationship; law is the natural result. The relationship between God and people is much too personally oriented to be distilled down to merely an obedience to a list of rules. Of the many references to God’s love that are found in the Pentateuch, only one is found outside of Deuteronomy!

From the divine side of the covenant, the focus is on **promise** – what God offers is a relationship that will be ongoing and provide for the needs of the people in a location, in prosperity (blessings), and in posterity (future generations). This focus on promise goes all the way back to Abraham! From the human side the focus is on the first commandment, on **faith and trust** in God alone. The only true “condition” placed on the people is that of faith and trust. Unfaithfulness to God is manifested fundamentally in the worship of other gods because it reveals a lack of faith and trust in the one God to provide for our needs. Those gods may be idols of wood and bronze, but they also may be manifested as idols of wealth, injustice and lack of mercy on others. We are called to be faithful to God just as the Israelites were, to have no other gods before us. Thus, the promise is an everlasting one, though participation in its fulfillment is not guaranteed to every person or generation. The promise is always there for believers to cling to, and they know that God will ever be at work to fulfill it. (Terence E. Fretheim, *Deuteronomistic History*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983: 23)

- 5) **Gravity of sin** made dramatically clear in Dt. Instructions were given once they entered the Promised Land to have a ceremony of blessings/curses with 6 tribes climbing Mt. Gerizim for the blessings and 6 tribes Mt. Ebal for the curses. Apostasy or idolatry was the most

serious sin of all (29:18-20) with death the only possible outcome, since it was a direct threat to the heart of the covenant relationship.

✓ **Law, land, leadership and rebellion**

The writer of Deuteronomy developed his entire theology around the importance of both the law and the land to Yahweh. It is in the land which Israel is about to occupy that the laws are to be obeyed; it is for the Israelites in the land that the laws were given.¹ Deuteronomy fuses together the promise of the land made originally to the early patriarchs and the tradition of the giving of the Law at Sinai.² The commandments are regulatory, in order to provide guidance while in the land; they are also conditional, in that only by their observance can the land be received and maintained. By obeying Yahweh's law, the Israelites could approximate to his holiness and retain his holy-clean land. Through violation of the law, they would profane themselves and could no longer remain in this holy-clean land.³ The land thus became a kind of mirror, reflecting the religious and ethical behavior of the people in their obedience or lack thereof to the will of God.⁴ It becomes the touchstone for life or death; given out of God's free grace, it is retained only by means of obedience.

The importance of the land now lay, not in an unconditional fulfillment of a promise (as it did since the time of Abraham), but in the continual obedience to the One who has given it (from this point forward in the history of the chosen people). The determinative bond that Israel must recognize is not with the land but with Yahweh as their leader. Israel must learn obedience to the covenant maker out of faith and love, or lose the land itself.⁵ The relationship with Yahweh, not his gift, is paramount and primary. Thus the central themes in many of the Exodus and Numbers stories of law, land, leadership and rebellion are finally carried out to their full and complete theological conclusion within Deuteronomy.

The central temptation of the land for Israel is that Israel will cease to remember and settle for a seemingly guaranteed security, to cease to be an historical people addressed by the Voice in history who gives life. The **link between law and land** is crucial; Torah exists so that Israel will not forget whose land it is and how it was given to Israel, **to maintain the people's historicity with Yahweh.**⁶ There is no easy assurance of the fulfillment of

¹ Norman R. Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 98.

² W. D. Davies, *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1982), 11.

³ Davies, 21.

⁴ Moshe Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1993), 184.

⁵ Norman C. Habel, *The Land is Mine* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 46.

⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 54, 61.

the promise for the next generation, once the wilderness generation ceases to exist. Though the next generation is promised that Yahweh will bring them into the land to possess it (Num. 14:31), they too must choose to obey rather than rebel. This second generation stands on the edge of the Promised Land with promises still awaiting final fulfillment.⁷ Will they trust Yahweh as their leader, now that Moses is taken from them? This pregnant question hovers over the Israelites as Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch draw to a close. Future Israelite history provides the answer.

As Christians, what would be the equivalent of "land" for us today? Does God ask us to return to the geographic location of Israel in order to worship Him there? Where is our identity and our security found in relationship with God? It is not in a physical location but within the Body of Christ, His church, where we exist in a completely satisfying relationship of wholeness with God.

√ **This book's influence on later people of the Bible**

How has Dt influenced later people of the Bible? (LaSor 126) This book held great influence for later biblical figures, including Samuel, Elijah, Hosea, Jeremiah who quoted it. During King Josiah's reign, it is believed that the book of the law discovered in the temple was Dt, and this is what sparked a religious revival. Jesus turned back Satan's three temptations with quotes from Dt (8:3; 6:13, 16) and when asked which commandment was greatest, He quoted 6:5. Dt is quoted often in the NT.

√ **Applications for today**

What are lessons for us today?

- How important it is for us to remember what God HAS done for us so that we do not become haughty in our own minds and forget His mercy and acts in our own history.
- That love is the foundation both of God's covenant with us and our response to that covenant. Obedience is an outflow of our love, not something that earns us favor in His sight.
- That we must be vigilant not to be enticed away from the true faith by false gods surrounding us in our culture today, just as the chosen people were warned about the gods in the land they were about to enter.

**** Discussion: Pre-course reading assignments**

Deuteronomy chapter 6; 10:12-22; 29:1-31:13; chapter 34

⁷ Dennis T. Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 151.

Name: _____
Score: _____ (100 possible points; 3 points each)

PENTATEUCH QUIZ

The Old Testament was originally written in which language:

- a. Greek
- b. Samaritan
- c. English
- d. Hebrew

Heilsgeschichte is a German word meaning:

- a. the history of the church
- b. the history of salvation
- c. high health and good luck
- d. hope for the future

Name one aspect/characteristic of God which is seen in the creation story of Genesis chapter one, and how it is presented there.

Describe an event from Genesis chapters 1-11 that reveals God's view of sin and explain what is that view.

The verse in Gen. 1:27: created God (man) in His image
 in image God created (him)

is an example of:

- a) a chiasmus
- b) a paronomasia
- c) antithetic parallelism
- d) bookends or inclusio

Name one main theme in the book of Genesis:

Circle way(s) that Hebrew authors emphasized important concepts:

- a) rhyming the last word of each verse
- b) using exclamation points
- c) using a chiasmus
- d) repeating the word or idea more than once
- e) both c and d

What are the three divisions (in English) of the Old Testament?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are the two main divisions of Genesis?

- 1.
- 2.

The main purpose of the Table of Nations in chapter 10 as understood by the person who wrote it down was to:

- a) legitimize political claims to power by certain kings.
- b) connect Noah to Jesus through direct lineage.
- c) present how all people groups are related to each other.
- d) explain how 12 sons became the 12 tribes of Israel.

How does God show judgment and mercy/grace in each of these stories?

Adam and Eve: Judgment

Grace

Cain killing Abel: Judgment

Grace

The Flood: Judgment

Grace

Tower of Babel: Judgment

Grace

What was the sign of the covenant that God required of Abraham and all his descendents?

- a) water baptism
- b) tattoo on the forehead
- c) male circumcision
- d) temple sacrifice

List the order of events from first/earliest (#1) to most recent/latest (#9):

_____ Isaac marries Rebekah

_____ Abraham almost sacrifices Isaac

_____ Noah and the flood

_____ Adam and Eve live in the Garden of Eden

_____ Isaac is born to Abraham and Sarah

_____ Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for food

_____ Cain kills Abel

_____ Abram is called from Haran to the Promised Land by God

_____ The Tower of Babel

What was so important about Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac? Why did God test Abraham on this?

The first covenant specified by God in the Bible is the following:

- a) the covenant with Moses on Mt. Sinai to form a holy nation
- b) the covenant not to destroy the earth again with a flood
- c) the covenant with Lamech to kill all his enemies
- d) the covenant with Abraham to bless him and make of him a great nation

End of Quiz

Name: _____
Score _____ out of 200 possible points
(4 points for each answer, unless otherwise specified)

FINAL EXAM - PENTATEUCH

Place the following in the correct chronological order. (#1 should be the earliest event and #8 should be the last event)

- _____ Moses leads the people to Mt. Sinai where God gives the 10 Commandments
- _____ Jacob has 12 sons
- _____ The Israelites wander in the wilderness for 40 years
- _____ Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers
- _____ The Israelites rebel by constructing and worshiping a golden calf
- _____ God brings the 10 plagues against Egypt
- _____ Joseph brings Jacob's family to Egypt
- _____ Moses prepares Joshua to lead the people into the Promised Land

The problem of the corrupting power of sin is seen in the first part of Genesis (chs. 1-11). What is God's answer to this problem, as found in chapters 12-50 of Genesis and in the rest of the Pentateuch?

Jacob had a total of 12 sons. Why is this important for the nation of Israel?

Name two promises God made to Abraham:

1.

2.

What is a main theme in the book of Exodus?

- a. God's deliverance of the people from slavery
- b. a holy God requires and provides for His people to be holy
- c. the covenant relationship with God is based on love
- d. the promises God made to the Patriarchs

In the 10 Commandments,

Commands 1-4 focus on: _____

Commands 5-10 focus on: _____

Name two Jewish institutions that have their foundation in the book of Exodus, as discussed in the lecture:

1.

2.

Egypt continued to influence the Israelites in the wilderness through:

- a. repeated attacks by Egyptian troops for 40 years
- b. Egyptian guards not allowing the Israelites to enter the Promised Land
- c. Egyptian hieroglyphs being used to write down the Pentateuch
- d. temptation to return to the security and gods of Egypt

Which event is considered central to Jews today in their understanding of God's redemptive plan for His chosen people?

- a. Moses marrying Jethro's daughter, Zipporah
- b. God leading the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage
- c. God indicating that Aaron and his lineage will be high priests
- d. God giving the Israelites the laws about leprosy

Name one way in which God's laws given to the Israelites differed from the laws of other ANE cultures.

Once each year the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies. This would take place during the:

- a. Passover
- b. Feast of Tabernacles
- c. Day of Atonement
- d. Feast of Weeks

Why do we not need to have a high priest entering the Holy of Holies once each year on our behalf today?

Mark the following as either Casuistic law (C) or Apodictic law (A).

_____ You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain.

_____ If a person steals a loaf of bread, then he must be fined 5 bushels of wheat.

What is God's purpose in giving the Israelites His laws?

- a. to mark them as His chosen people
- b. to give them a standard for godly and healthy living
- c. to reveal His glory and holiness to the people
- d. all of the above

Match the events listed below with the correct book location:

(a particular book may be used more than once)

E = Exodus

L = Leviticus

N = Numbers

D = Deuteronomy

_____ 12 spies are sent into the Promised Land and some give a bad report to the people when they return.

_____ The 10 Commandments are given by God to the people.

_____ Moses gives three covenantal speeches to the people on the plains of Moab before they enter the Promised Land.

_____ God sends the plagues against Pharaoh so that he will release the Israelites.

_____ Aaron and his sons are consecrated by Moses in an ordination ceremony to be priests for God.

The purpose of Deuteronomy deals with a "new" situation facing the people. Name two aspects that were new:

1.

2.

Why did God not allow the Israelites to enter the Promised Land for 40 years?

- a. because Caleb and Joshua gave the people a bad report about the occupants of the land
- b. because Moses disobeyed God by striking the rock to obtain water
- c. because the Israelites rebelled against God and did not believe He would bring them safely into the land
- d. because Aaron made them a golden calf that they worshipped

In Deuteronomy, God's covenant relationship with the Chosen People is more fully clarified than in any of the other books of the Pentateuch as being based upon:

- a. judgment
- b. love
- c. sin
- d. bloodlines

Why were the tabernacle and the sacrifices necessary for the people's relationship with God in the OT?

Even if the temple were available today for sacrifices, why would Christians not need to make sacrifices to God?

With regard to the issue of blessing in the life of Jacob: [only 1 point each]

- (1) From whom did he steal a blessing? _____
- (2) Who blessed Jacob later in his life? _____
- (3) What name change took place at that time? _____
- (4) Who did Jacob then bless soon after the name change? _____

Joseph's story should remind us that:

- a. the powerful will prosper and the poor will suffer
- b. what others may intend for harm, God can use for our good
- c. we are to forgive others only when we have full restitution
- d. dreams are never used by God to send messages to us

Fill in the blanks:

Rebekah gives birth to two sons named _____ and _____.

Adam and Eve's three sons listed in the Bible are _____,
_____, and _____.

The parent who favored Jacob was named _____. Then Jacob showed favoritism towards his wife _____ and his son _____.

Name one event or happening found in any of the books Exodus through Deuteronomy (not Genesis) that illustrates how God is sovereign over all people groups, not just the Chosen People/Israelites. Explain how this event shows God's sovereignty and power over pagan unbelievers.

Name one event or happening found in any of the books Exodus through Deuteronomy (not Genesis) that illustrates God's gracious mercy despite human sin. Again, explain how this event reveals His mercy.

What was one important reason for the Israelite people to be made holy through their obedience, practices and rituals?

- a. so that God who is holy could reside and be present among them
- b. so that they would be superior to the other ANE groups of people and make them their slaves
- c. so that the other people groups would hate them and their God
- d. so that they could earn the right to receive the promises of God made to Noah

How does God make us holy today?

End of Test