

# *Creative Living Bible Study*

## **New Beginnings**

Studies on the Book of Genesis

*A Creative Living International Publication*

**NEW BEGINNINGS**

**STUDIES FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS**

### ***Before you begin . . .***

Genesis is where most people begin when they decide to read through the entire Bible. It is one of the most moving and exciting books in the Scriptures. The first book of the Bible, its events lay the foundation for the main theme running throughout the Bible: God's loving redemption of mankind.

The purpose of our study of Genesis is to get a simple overview of its events, understand why it is important to the rest of the Bible, and to derive biblical principles from its pages to help us live healthier and happier lives today.

What you discover in the weeks to come may be new to you, or maybe review, but my hope is that it will refresh your understanding of God's greatness, His great love for you, and His wise principles for living. Our lives are always changing . . . there are many new beginnings. May the pages of this study give you hope as you see the unchanging faithfulness of God through every change of life.

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Creative Living Bible Studies

## **PART 1**

### ***THE BEGINNINGS OF HISTORY***

Genesis is a book of beginnings: of life, death, marriage, parenting, problems. The characters in Genesis experienced them all. Genesis is also a book of facts. It is not an exhaustive book of scientific or historical fact, but rather a book containing the facts needed to answer certain questions the author meant to address.

Jewish tradition ascribes authorship of Genesis and the first five books of the Bible to Moses. Jesus Christ explicitly ascribed these writings to Moses as well (Luke 24:44). Some theologians contend that unknown authors or editors long after Moses put together these works, but these theories have many variations as well as flaws. There are many evidences, however, that the true author was Moses, although he may have used existing sources for Genesis and some minor editing may have been done after his death.

With Moses as the author, we can assume Genesis was addressed to Israel during their years in the wilderness around 1450 B.C. It was written to explain to these people where they had come from, where they were going, and why. Though miraculously delivered from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses, they understood very little of how and why it happened. Although they were Hebrew and had always been outcasts in the

Egyptian culture, they had little knowledge of the God of their forefather Abraham. God set them apart to be a holy nation, but they had a long way to go from the pagan thinking they had developed in Egypt during 400 years of captivity. They needed to know God and His purpose in history, guides to their worship, and standards for moral and ethical decisions.

So the five books of Moses were written to help the Israelites make a clean break with their past in a pagan society and begin to look at life from God's perspective. They were to become a new culture, out of which the world would be blessed. They needed, as we do, answers to the questions: Who is God? What is my relationship to Him? How did it come about? How does this affect the way I live? Why should I live this way? As we follow the history and people of this book, we will receive, as the Israelites did, God's great answers to these questions.

### **Easy Breakdown of Genesis**

#### ***I. Beginnings of Mankind (Chapters 1-11)***

***Creation***

***Fall***

***Flood***

***Babel***

#### ***II. Founding Fathers of Israel (Chapters 12-50)***

***Abraham***

***Isaac***

***Jacob***

***Joseph***

## **Lesson 1**

### ***CREATION***

#### **Genesis 1:1-2:3**

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” There is nothing here about the details of creation, just that in the beginning, however distant that may have been, God called into being everything. The Genesis creation account is not a technical review, rather it is written in everyday language, as its events would have appeared to the average person.

First, God prepared the earth to be life sustaining. Then He made plant and animal life and finally man. The process involved six stages described as days.<sup>1</sup> One brought light, another atmosphere, another the establishment of land, sea, and plants, yet another the functioning of the sun, moon, and stars, another fish and birds, and finally animals and other land life. When the earth was ready God created man, the crown of His work, and gave him rule and dominion over all the earth.

All that had been made was declared “very good,” and God ended the six days with a day of rest.

### ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

#### **Order in Our Lives**

Imagine the judge in an unruly courtroom pounding his gavel and shouting, “Order in the court!” Wouldn't it be nice if we could bring order to the sometimes chaotic arena of our individual lives just by pounding a gavel? A turmoil-filled world can easily take over our inner world as well. As we look at this first chapter of Genesis, we see God bring order, beauty, and purpose to a lifeless planet in space. He began here to reveal Himself as a

God of order with infinite power to bring life where there was none and meaning out of chaos. Let's look at what this can mean in our lives today.

## **Lesson 2**

### ***ADAM AND EVE***

#### **Genesis 2:4-25**

God prepared a beautiful garden in Eden.<sup>1</sup> Then He fashioned Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the life that would allow him to know God personally and reflect His image.<sup>2</sup> Adam was placed in the garden to begin his responsibilities of governing nature and beginning the human race. To give Adam the freedom of choice, God placed a simple, but precise test before him. He forbid Adam to eat of one tree in the middle of the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>3</sup>

Adam's first task was to name all the animals. (This first man could *not* have been without intellect or language.) As God paraded every creature before him, Adam named each one, and ". . . that was its name."

But not one creature could be a companion to Adam on the same physical, mental, and spiritual level. For the first time, God looked at His creation and said it "was not good." Adam needed a partner. So, the account continues, God put Adam to sleep and fashioned Eve from Adam's rib. She was the perfect complement to Adam, and he was elated.<sup>4</sup>

The chapter ends with the first instituted marriage in the beautiful environment of Eden.<sup>5</sup> With this, God declared all that He had made was *very good* (1:31).

### ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

#### **How's Your Self-Image?**

How is your sense of self-worth? Each of us carries a mental picture of ourselves, and often it screams at us to be different. Great emotional and social stress stems from poor self-esteem as well as all kinds of destructive behavior.

The most solid foundation for a healthy self-image is not found in what other people think, but in grasping God's truth about us. In Genesis 1 and 2, we observe God's creation of the universe, the earth, plants and creatures of the earth, and a beautiful garden, all in preparation for humanity. With His own hands, He formed man, and with His breath, God gave him the capacity for a personal relationship with the Creator. With this, the great value of each human being is firmly established.

Beginning with the creation story, and throughout the Bible, God encourages us to believe in ourselves as we trust in Him. Together, the two create a healthy self-image. Let's look at some biblical truths that support self-esteem.

## **Lesson 3**

### ***THE BIG MISTAKE***

#### **Genesis 3**

The union of Adam and Eve was happy, and the world around them was perfect. Chapter 2 ends with the words "not ashamed." But Genesis 3 ushers in a new experience for Adam and Eve that changed mankind forever after.

God created man in His image by giving him a spirit that could relate to God and other human beings intimately. He gave him authority to rule over the earth, and gave him freedom of choice. He also gave man and woman the freedom to choose to trust and obey God by means of a simple test. In the center of the garden was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,<sup>1</sup> and God had forbidden Adam and Eve to eat its fruit. He told them that if they did, they would “surely die.” The command was specific as was the consequence; the test was not a harsh one.

In its subtle way, the serpent persuaded Eve that she would be better off to disregard God’s command. He convinced her that God was deceiving her, and she really wouldn’t die if she ate the fruit, but would instead become as wise as God. She would become “like God.” With this, Eve ate the fruit, then offered some to Adam, who also chose to disregard God’s command. Shame and fear instantly came upon the couple,<sup>2</sup> and soon the Lord confronted them. He informed them that the death penalty, although not immediate, would come, and they would have to leave the garden where they had freely and intimately walked with Him.

Life became very different for Adam and Eve, reminding them continually of their poor choice in not trusting their Creator. Difficulties the Lord predicted would trouble them are still part of our lives today. For the woman, there would be difficulty in childbirth, parenting, and marriage. The man’s greatest struggles would relate to making a living.

But the most important prediction was addressed to Satan, who had used the subtle serpent to draw this couple away from God. The Lord informed Satan that he would one day be “crushed” by the “seed,” or offspring, of the woman. Herein lies the first prediction in the Bible about a Savior, later referred to as Messiah, who would redeem, or provide a way to bring people back into, the original intimate relationship with God.

The chapter ends with God clothing the couple with garments of skin, replacing their fragile fig leaves. To keep mankind from living forever in this sad condition, He made the fruit of the “tree of life”<sup>3</sup> unavailable to them and banished them from the garden.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **Dealing With Bad Habits and Temptation**

People often ask why suffering and evil exist if God loves His creation. Although the Bible never answers this question directly, Genesis 3 begins to explain the reason. Most of the hardship around us is the result of an initial decision not to trust God, a decision that has become the rule rather than the exception in the human race.

Adam and Eve listened to the advice of a creature rather than their Creator, followed their own inclinations rather than God’s instructions, doubted God’s concern for their best interests, and made self-fulfillment their goal. We all face these temptations. The first couple’s story reveals much about how temptation comes to us and about how to deal with it successfully. Let’s look at some biblical principles that can help us live with the constant pulls toward unhealthy choices.

## **Lesson 4**

### ***CAIN AND ABEL***

#### **Genesis 4 & 5**

Eve’s first son, Cain, was followed by his brother Abel. In their adult years, these two men brought offerings to the Lord, and Cain’s was not acceptable.

Though the reason is not given, some assume from 4:6-7 that Cain had not brought his offering with the right attitude or as he had been instructed.<sup>1</sup> Rather than remedy the situation and please God, Cain became very angry. He disregarded the Lord's encouragement to fight against the evil attitudes overpowering him. Instead, Cain lured his brother Abel to a field where he killed him, then denied responsibility for the murder.

The Lord's gracious judgment on this action was to make Cain a protected fugitive criminal. Cain complained that God's punishment was too severe. The account that follows in Genesis 4:17-24 records the lineage of Cain.<sup>2</sup> His son Lamech, who married two wives and became a killer himself, had no regret for his actions.

On the brighter side, Adam and Eve had another son named Seth, who produced godly offspring. Also at this time "men began to call on [or proclaim] the name of the Lord." In the line of Seth are two outstanding characters: one is Enoch, who walked with God and never experienced death,<sup>3</sup> the other is Methuselah, the oldest man recorded in the Bible, who died the year of the Noachic Flood (Genesis 5:25,28;7:6).<sup>4</sup> The lineage of Seth can be traced through the flood and down through the ages to the birth of Christ (Luke 3:23,37).

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **Dealing With Anger**

Cain's anger brought heartache to his family and had a rippling effect for generations. We all struggle with anger, some of us more than others. As we saw in Genesis 4:7, God's desire is that we successfully deal with anger.

## **Lesson 5**

### ***THE FLOOD***

#### **Genesis 6 & 7**

In the first chapters of Genesis, the author has shown how rebellion toward God became part of the human race. The result was fractured relationships between man and God, damaged family and social relationships and violence throughout the habitat God had created for man's enjoyment. Moral corruption continued to spread like cancer on the earth until God saw "that every inclination of the thoughts of his [man's] heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man...His heart was filled with pain" (6:5-6). He determined to bring a flood to end the progression of evil. There was a special man named Noah, a man who "walked with God." Seeing that Noah was the only man on earth who feared Him, God decided to spare his life and that of his family. They followed God's orders in building a huge seaworthy vessel called an ark.<sup>1-2</sup> On this vessel there was room for Noah's family, a male/female pair of every species of the earth, and food to sustain them all.

Seven days after all had entered the ark and the doors were shut, heavy rain fell for 40 days and 40 nights along with the bursting forth of subterranean waters.<sup>3</sup> The water rose until it cleared the highest mountains by 20 feet. The flood continued for 150 days, and nothing that breathed remained alive outside the ark.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **Taking God Seriously**

A. W. Tozer wrote that God "will always deal in justice when His mercy is despised."<sup>5</sup> While the people of the earth had become morally degenerate, God still offered them the chance to repent. As Noah built the ark and preached about the coming judgment, however, the people jeered and went on with their corrupt lifestyle. Then the day came when God's incredible promises to Noah were fulfilled. Miraculously, thousands of pairs of species came forth to enter the ark with Noah and his family. The enormous door was shut, and the flood began. God's mercy had been rejected. His judgment came.

We might be tempted to ask ourselves, "Why struggle to please God with my life when the world is going a different, perhaps even more attractive, direction?" The Bible promises constructive living and fulfillment when we choose to take God and His direction seriously. The events of Noah's day remind us of the righteous character of God. His justice will ultimately prevail in human affairs.

## **Lesson 6**

### ***THE RAINBOW PROMISE***

#### **Genesis 8:1-9:17**

After five months, the ark rested upon a peak in the high ranges of Armenia on a mountain now called Ararat. Today it towers to the height of 16,946 feet. All waited as the waters continued to recede.

When they finally left the ark, Noah, his family, and the animals had not set foot on dry ground for more than a year (cf. 7:11; 8:13-14). Now they owned the world. It was a new beginning.<sup>1</sup> God blessed them and commissioned them to repopulate the earth.

At this time, creatures, in addition to vegetation, became food for man. God made clear, however, that the blood of the creature (representing its life) and *especially* the blood of man, finally belongs to God alone.<sup>2</sup> In light of this fact, God instituted human government with instructions to punish murder of another human being (9:6).

Upon disembarking the ark, the first thing Noah did was build an altar and offer sacrifices to the Lord. The aroma of his sacrifices went upward to God bearing Noah's gratitude and worship.<sup>3</sup> God was pleased with the heart of this man, and made a sacred promise to never again bring judgment on the earth with a natural catastrophe. The rainbow became the token of this promise to Noah and mankind.

## **BUILDING ON THE BASICS**

### **Hope in a Crisis**

The definition of the word *crisis* is "the turning point for better or worse," or "an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs whose outcome will make a decisive difference for better or worse."

Noah and his family lived during a crisis like none other in all of history. The downward spiral of sin reached the limits (6:5,11-12), and God responded with judgment for the many and redemption for the righteous few. Israel's history would repeat this pattern often (cf. Isaiah 10:20-23; Romans 11:1-6).

Our world is full of injustices brought on not by God's design, but by man's attempt to rule life apart from God. The issue lies in the heart of each person, the inherited inability to totally live up to righteous standards. But the hope in the crisis becomes the hope in any crisis. The Lord of

## Lesson 7

### ***THE TOWER OF BABEL***

#### **Genesis 9:18-11:32**

Noah and his three sons had disembarked from the ark in the mountains of Ararat near the headwaters of the Euphrates. God blessed them and told them to scatter and repopulate the earth. The first thing they did, it seems, was to migrate back about 500 miles to Babylon, possibly their pre-flood home.

Noah planted a vineyard and lay drunk and naked in his tent from the wine. His son, Ham, discovered his father this way and made fun of him.<sup>1</sup> To the ancients, such mockery destroyed the sanctity of the family and the strength of the father. When he discovered what Ham had done, Noah prophesied that Ham's attitude would bear fruit in the immorality of his offspring, the Canaanites. He also predicted that the lifestyle of the Canaanites would cause them to serve the descendants of Shem and Japheth.

Chapter 10, called the Table of Nations, specifically follows each of Noah's sons, Japheth (10:2-5), Ham (10:6-20), and Shem (10:21-31), as they began to repopulate the earth. This account gives details of descendants, geographical areas in which they settled, and languages. While the Table of Nations particularly focuses on those descendants who would later affect the nation of Israel, the author's concluding statement reminds the reader that *all* nations of the earth descended from Noah (10:32).

Shem was placed last in the account since it was through his lineage that the nation of Israel would come, the origins of which are the focus of Genesis. Japheth's descendants moved north and west to become the progenitors of the Caucasian races of Europe and Asia. The Shemites (Semitic peoples) moved south and east and would be the spiritual leaders of men who would teach the religion of Jehovah to the world. The Hamites moved south and west and would settle Canaan (now Israel) on the Mediterranean, Arabia, Egypt, and the east coast of Africa.

Nimrod, a grandson of Ham, became the first great leader on the earth (10:8-12). He is believed to have built the great cities of Babylon and Nineveh and probably was responsible for the Tower of Babel enterprise (10:10; 11:9).<sup>3</sup> The Tower of Babel event of Chapter 11, which occurred *before* Chapter 10, explains why the nations scattered with different languages (cf. 10:5). The story is more than a fanciful tale, since it reflects practices known from archaeology. The people were united to build a tower of acclaim to themselves, to refuse God's command for them to populate the earth (9:1), and, some theologians believe, to manipulate astral gods to gain their own control of the earth.<sup>3</sup> God confused their rebellion by giving them different languages, making it impossible for them to continue to cooperate with each other in the project. It was God's method of dispersing the race to its task of subduing the earth. This scattering allowed God to continue to move toward the building of a nation (Israel) out of which would come the Redeemer of the world.

Chapter 11 continues with the genealogy of Shem's descendants<sup>4</sup> and at last the beginnings of the family of Abraham, which we will be following for the rest of Genesis.

### ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

#### **Help for the Tongue**

All of us know the power of the tongue. Speech has brought both wonderful blessing to mankind and the greatest destruction man has ever known.

In Genesis, collective communication led to total rebellion and

independence from God. The miracle of different languages kept man from quickly destroying himself again and sent him back to the task of populating the earth. The difficulty in communication actually allowed the people of the world to exist longer without God's judgment in order to allow time for God's plan of redemption to come.

God is able to assist us if we want to control our tongue. While for some the task may involve a process and continual work, God's Word is full of motivation and guidance for the one who needs help for the tongue. Let's look at some of these practical principles.

## **PART 2**

### ***ISRAEL'S BEGINNINGS— ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB***

Part 1 ended with the human race scattered over all the earth and speaking different languages. Genealogies traced the line of Adam to Noah (Genesis 5) and Noah to Abram (Genesis 10, 11). Noah prophesied (9:26) that the descendants of Shem (Semites) would have the Lord as their God and would become missionaries to the other peoples of the earth. So it came to pass that out of this line of Shem came Abram, God's man for the hour in early Old Testament revelation.

As this section begins, Abram's father, Terah, has moved his family from Ur in the Euphrates valley, about 550 miles north to Haran. After Terah's death, Abram moved to Canaan with the promise of God that he would father a great nation that would bring blessing to all the peoples of the earth. Part 2 of our study will follow the emergence of that nation through the lives of Abraham, his son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob.

## **Lesson 1**

### ***THE CALL OF ABRAM***

#### **Genesis 12-13**

"The Lord had said to Abram . . ." leave all that is familiar—your country, your people, your home and your relatives, and go to another part of the world yet to be announced. "So Abram left, as the Lord had told him."

We have seen the result of man's decisions not to follow God's leadership. Now God called a faithful man whose obedience would bring blessing to the entire world. In spite of the discomforts, Abram chose to follow and worship the one true God. With Genesis 12, we begin the study of one of the Bible's greatest men of faith, Abram.

Perhaps because of danger, perhaps because of his son Abram's calling from God, Abram's father, Terah, moved his family from Ur toward Canaan a thousand miles away. For some reason, Terah stopped short of Canaan, settling in Haran (11:31).<sup>1</sup> After Terah's death, 75 year-old Abram took his wife, Sarai, who was 65, and his nephew, Lot, and continued on to Canaan. There the Lord appeared to Abram again, promising to give him the land of Canaan and a nation through his offspring which would bring blessing to the whole world (12:2-3,7).

Abram continually worshiped the Lord, building altars at Shechem and Bethel. Finally he "pitched his tent" at Bethel in the hilly area overlooking Palestine on the edge of the Negeb desert area.

After this, famine caused Abram to go to the well-watered Nile area of Egypt to live for a while. During this time, Sarai, because of her beauty, was



taken into the Pharaoh's harem. This couple had decided beforehand that if Pharaoh should want Sarai, they would tell him that they were brother and sister, not man and wife, in order to protect Abram's life.<sup>2</sup> (Sarai *was* actually Abram's half-sister.) During Sarai's stay in the palace, the Lord inflicted Pharaoh and his household with serious diseases, causing him to discover Abram's lie. He returned Sarai to him and sent Abram and company back to the Negeb.

Abram and Lot had become so wealthy that the land could not support the two of them with all their flocks, herds, possessions and servants if they stayed together. Abram graciously gave Lot the choice of land, and Lot chose the well-watered Jordan River area toward the east. Abram then took the hill country of Canaan.

While Lot adjusted to the wickedness of the men of Sodom, Abram continued to worship the Lord and receive His promise to give him the Canaanite land and a nation of descendants that would bless the world.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **Perspective on Possessions**

Material possessions are too often exalted by the world around us. As we naturally want to be accepted, we subtly fall into the world's unhealthy values. The Bible has some principles to help us make wise choices regarding possessions. Abraham found freedom to follow and trust God as he lived by these principles. Let's look at the wisdom God's Word offers in this area of our lives.

## **Lesson 2**

### ***CRISIS AND COVENANT***

#### **Genesis 14-15**

One day, Abram, now called Hebrew<sup>1</sup> by his neighbors, received news that four powerful eastern kings had swept through the Jordan Valley, attacking and defeating five Canaanite kings. The four kings plundered Sodom and Gomorrah, and Lot was among those taken captive by the fleeing invaders. Without hesitation, Abram assembled 318 trained servants and allies and pursued the enemy. After overtaking the invaders in a night attack at Dan (140 miles from Abram's home in Hebron), Abram's men continued to pursue the enemy through the night, finally defeating them at Hobah (100 miles north of Dan). This was an extraordinary victory over four leading kings who had just seized such a large Transjordanian area. Abram recovered Lot, other prisoners and goods, and turned homeward. Near Jerusalem, the kings of Sodom and of Salem (Jerusalem) met Abram. Melchizedek, king of Salem<sup>2</sup> and priest of his people, recognized Abram to be "of the most high God," and praised God for giving Abram the incredible victory over such a powerful enemy. Simultaneously, Abram recognized that this priest and king believed in the one true God and gave him a tenth of the spoils.

Then the king of Sodom offered Abram the spoils of the battle that had initially been taken from the invaded people, but Abram politely refused, not wanting it said that anyone other than God was the source of his prosperity.

In the events of this chapter, Abram demonstrated once again that there was nothing selfish in his character. He acted out of devotion to his family and to God, and God began to honor Abram as He had promised.<sup>3</sup>

However, Abram and Sarai's concern began to grow over Sarai's barren state. The promises of God involved the multiplying of Abram's descendants, and he had none. The Lord appeared to Abram to reassure and guarantee that he *would* father a son and give birth to a great nation. In a dramatic encounter with Abram, the Lord made a binding covenant to fulfill all his promises.

At the same time, the Lord gave Abram an amazing prediction of the future, revealing the 400-year captivity and slavery that Abram's descendants would experience in Egypt some 200 years later. Their deliverance by God, and return to Canaan to possess the land was verified by the solemn and binding covenant which the Lord then made with Abram.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **Conquering Impulsiveness**

God blessed Abram by setting him apart to become the founding father of the nation of Israel and by giving him a personal relationship with Himself like no other man alive. But Abram and Sarai were childless, and time seemed to be running out as the promises of God hadn't even begun to be fulfilled.

Perseverance is not a natural human virtue. In our instant society, we are even less prone than Abram to wait on anything. But *waiting on God*, or *putting our trust or hope* in Him, is a way God reveals Himself to us, calls us to pray, and allows us to grow closer to Him. In Chapter 15 and the chapters to come, we see how Abram and Sarai learn the importance of faithful perseverance.

## **Lesson 3**

### ***ISHMAEL IS BORN***

#### **Genesis 16-17**

The Lord had been specific in His promise to give Abram and Sarai a son (15:4), but as the years passed the distance between the promise and reality became more and more baffling. Impatience and frustration broke down Sarai's faith, and she persuaded Abram to try to have a son through her maid, Hagar. Since the practice of ensuring a male heir in such a way was common legal custom in that day, Sarai and Abram decided to take the matter into their own hands.

But the results were disastrous. Hagar became pregnant and began to despise Sarai, who blamed Abram. Abram withdrew from the situation, Sarai mistreated Hagar, and Hagar ran away. Alone by a spring in the desert, the angel of the Lord<sup>1</sup> appeared to Hagar and consoled her, telling her to go back to Sarai, submit to her and look forward to God's blessing on her son. The Lord gave her the name for the child: Ishmael, meaning "God hears." He also told Hagar that Ishmael (as would the nation that would come from him; cf. 25:12-18) would be a wild, hostile person with enemies on every side. Regardless, Hagar was awed and uplifted by her meeting with the Lord. She named the place Beer Lahai Roi meaning "well of the Living One who sees (or *looks after*) me." God's revelation to Hagar, as well as to Sarai and Abram, was that He does *hear* and *see* distress and affliction and will surely fulfill His promises. Hagar obeyed the Lord as she returned to give birth to Abram's son, Ishmael, when Abram was 86 years old.

Thirteen years later, the Lord appeared to Abram introducing Himself as *El Shaddai*, or *God Almighty*, referring to the all-powerful and all-sufficient

character of God. With the encouragement that nothing is impossible to God, He proceeded to reconfirm His promises to Abram. The Lord first renamed him Abraham, meaning *father of many*, indicating that he would indeed have many descendants as promised. Likewise, he changed Sarai's name to Sarah, meaning *princess*, referring to her role as the mother of nations. Then the Lord restated that nations would come through Abraham's descendants, and that the entire land of Canaan, where Abraham was presently an alien, would be theirs.

After this, the Lord instituted circumcision<sup>2</sup> as the sign of Abraham's covenant with God to submit to His rule. It was also a sign of *God's* covenant to Abraham and his offspring, the circumcised. In prompt obedience, Abraham took every male in his household and had them circumcised that day, including himself at 99 years of age.

God also promised Abraham that Sarah would have a son. Abraham *laughed* in amazement. He was 99, Sarah 90! They had come to accept that Ishmael would be Abram's heir. But while God promised to bless Ishmael, His covenant would be established with the son born to Sarah whom God named Isaac, meaning *he laughs*.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **What Price Impatience?**

The events of this lesson span 14 years and exhibit clearly the importance of trusting God's Word and waiting for its fulfillment. Anyone who walks by faith for any length of time will face situations similar to Abraham's and Sarah's. Waiting and trusting are hard for us. Impatience is much more natural and often leads, as it did for them, to taking matters into our own hands. The mess they made is the typical result. The grace of God and His redemption of the situation in spite of our human failures always emerges as we again turn to Him in faith.

What does impatience cost? Having an answer etched in our minds can help us avoid impatient choices. Let's make some observations about the biblical principles related to this important subject.

## **Lesson 4**

### ***SODOM AND GOMORRAH***

#### **Genesis 18-19**

"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (18:14a). "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (18:25). These two rhetorical questions ring out in the events of this section of Genesis.

The text begins with the early afternoon visit of the Lord<sup>1</sup> and two angels to Abraham's tent near the great trees of Mamre. Abraham hurried to make preparations for a meal, after which the Lord announced to Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son by the same time one year later.

Sarah laughed to herself in disbelief; it was no longer physically possible for her to have children at 90 years of age. But even her laughter to herself was not missed by the Lord. He addressed her unbelieving attitude, assuring her of His faithfulness and ability to do what seems impossible to man.

Before ending the visit, the Lord walked with Abraham to a spot overlooking the Jordan valley where the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah lay. The two angels walked on toward the cities while the Lord lingered to tell Abraham His plan to bring judgment on the corrupt culture in the valley

below.<sup>2</sup> Abraham responded with a series of questions probing into the character, mercy, and justice of God. He asked if the Lord would destroy the cities even if righteous people were living there. The Lord assured Abraham that if even ten people were righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah, He would not destroy the place.

As the two angels arrived in Sodom, they were met at the gate of the city by Abraham's nephew, Lot, who begged them to come to his house. While Lot recognized the men as angels, they looked like ordinary people to the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:1,5). Word of two new men in town got around, and later that night Lot's home was surrounded by men of the city who wanted to sexually assault the angel guests. Lot's pleas and even the incredible offer of his own daughters<sup>3</sup> were refused by the men outside the house. The angels brought control to the situation by striking all the men around the house blind, giving Lot time to gather his family, and finally bringing quick destruction to the entire area.

As Lot, his wife, and two daughters fled, his wife looked back in disobedience and was instantly turned into a pillar of salt. Lot and his daughters fled to Zoar, a city the angels agreed to spare for them, and then moved to the mountains where they lived in a cave. Fearing they would never marry or conceive children, Lot's daughters schemed to continue the family line through incest with their father after getting him drunk. The resulting tribes of their offspring, Moab and Ammon, would become bitter enemies of the descendants of Lot's uncle, Abraham.

These chapters show the onward march of Abraham toward God's promises of blessing. Simultaneously, we can observe the miserable failure of Lot, who compromised with the world around him. Finally, as in past accounts in Genesis, we see once again that indeed "nothing is too hard for the Lord," and "the Judge of all the earth will do right."

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **Current Events Speak**

Lot's experience certainly reflects the importance of not compromising with the ungodliness in the world around us. But we can also learn from his story how to become involved in the solutions rather than the problems in the world around us. The Bible warns us of corruption that takes place before complete ruin of a society. It also gives us godly principles we can practice as we try to provide solutions to the needs of our society.

## **Lesson 5**

### ***ISAAC IS BORN***

#### **Genesis 20-21**

In our last study, we saw Abraham as an example of a man whose faith in God gave him the integrity necessary to stand apart. In this lesson, we will observe the results of times when he did not trust God. As we learn from his successes, we can also learn from his failures.

Abraham moved southwest to Gerar where he lied, as he did before (cf. Genesis 12:10-20), about Sarah's real identity. In order to protect himself from the local king, Abraham said Sarah was his sister.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, King Abimelech took her into his harem. To save Sarah, the soon-to-be mother of the promised heir of Abraham, the Lord came to Abimelech in a dream to warn him to give Sarah back to Abraham.

The king immediately called Abraham to discuss the matter, at which time Abraham gave the king his excuse for doing what he did. Abimelech, in the

fear of Abraham's God, returned Sarah with gifts to make amends and an invitation to Abraham to live in the land wherever he wanted. Abraham prayed for Abimelech, and God restored his household.

Chapter 21 is the happy story of the birth of the long-awaited heir of Abraham and Sarah. As the Lord had instructed, they named him Isaac, meaning "he laughs." Sarah said, "Everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." She was 90 years old, Abraham 100.

At a feast held on the day of Isaac's weaning,<sup>2</sup> Sarah saw Ishmael, the son of Abraham and her maid Hagar, mocking Isaac. Sarah demanded and God concurred that Abraham should send Ishmael and Hagar away. By faith, Abraham sent them off with only food and water. As God had promised, He followed them, staying with Ismael as he grew and blessing him as a son of Abraham.

Our text for this lesson ends with Abimelech and Abraham making a treaty at Beersheba in the land of the Philistines.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **The Gift of Joy**

Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." Although she made some big mistakes in her impatience with divine delays, Sarah followed her husband in God's callings on his life. Her experience became a picture of the promise, "Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5b).

God desires joy to be a part of our lives. The Bible has a lot to say about how and why God brings joy and what its benefits are for us.

## **Lesson 6**

### ***ISAAC ON THE ALTAR***

#### **Genesis 22-23**

Isaac was probably in his teens or older when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son on an altar. This was an incredible demand upon Abraham, but God knew this man's faith would stand. God also proved *His* faithfulness and bestowed great blessing because of Abraham's resolve.

Through circumcision of himself and the males of his household, Abraham had both covenanted himself to obey God and dedicated his son to the Lord. Now came the test of these commitments. Would Abraham obey, and would he give back his son to God? The answer to both questions was "yes." As Abraham raised his hand to take Isaac's life, he believed God would either provide another sacrifice or bring Isaac back from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). Whatever He did, Abraham knew God would fulfill His promise to give him descendants through Isaac, numerous as the sand on the seashore (15:4-5; 17:19-21).

The angel of the Lord stayed the hand of Abraham, and a ram in the thicket became the substitutionary offering for Isaac. This sheep became a picture of the substitutionary "lamb of God" (John 1:29) to come in Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> The sacrificial love of Abraham was analogous to the Father's love in sacrificing His only Son for the sins of the world (John 3:16; Romans 8:32). The Lord responded to Abraham's incredible faith: "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through

your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me” (22:16-18). Abraham and Isaac had seen the amazing working of God. They could be sure all He promised through their lives for the generations to come would come true.

In Genesis 23, the author records the death of Sarah, Abraham’s faithful wife of probably more than 100 years. In his grief, Abraham buried Sarah in a cave at the end of a field that he purchased in Canaan<sup>3</sup> for an exorbitant price. His purchase of this plot showed Abraham’s commitment to follow the Lord in making Canaan a homeland for him and his children’s children.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **Trusting God**

In Genesis 22, we see a supreme test of faith, and believers in God throughout history have benefited from the same humble and instant obedience Abraham displayed.

God always tests our faith, not to see what we will do, rather to prove Himself real and faithful to us. When we fail to trust Him, He remains faithful, but we miss the great rewards that come with trust.

According to the Bible, at the heart of the wise person is a “fear” or “reverential trust” in the Lord (Proverbs 1:7a). Trust in a biblical sense is not a “what-will-be-will-be” attitude, but rather a disciplined mental choice that results in bold action. Trust means making decisions to obey God based on an understanding of who God is.

Why should we trust God? Why did Abraham trust God to such an extent? As we continue our Genesis study, we will observe some biblical answers to these questions.

## **Lesson 7**

### ***REBEKAH***

#### **Genesis 24:1-25:11**

Abraham was 140 years old, and God blessed him in every way. The people of the area called him a “mighty prince;” and he was held in high esteem by all. Abraham had become very wealthy. He gave generous gifts to the children of Keturah, his second wife, and to his son Ishmael. But Abraham’s son Isaac would be the sole heir of Abraham’s great estate. More importantly, Isaac was the heir to God’s promises that had directed Abraham’s life for the past 70 years (12:1-3;17:19).

But Isaac at 40 was still not married. In light of his spiritual heritage, Abraham was concerned that Isaac find a wife from his own people, rather than from Canaan.<sup>1</sup> With a solemn oath,<sup>2</sup> Abraham’s chief servant was commissioned to travel several hundred miles northeast to the Euphrates River valley where his brother Nahor’s family lived and find a wife for Isaac. Abraham believed the Lord would send an angel ahead of his servant to give him success in his mission.

After the long journey, the servant stopped at a well and prayed fervently for the leading and provision of God. Before he finished praying, Rebekah, a beautiful young girl, approached and served him by offering him a drink and watering his camels. As he interacted with her, he found her to be the granddaughter of Abraham’s brother Nahor, Isaac’s second cousin. Through a series of events and interactions with the family, everyone realized that it was the Lord’s will for Rebekah to marry Isaac. She journeyed back with Eliezer and the entourage to become Isaac’s wife. Isaac loved her.

Genesis 25 briefly tells of Abraham's second wife, or concubine,<sup>3</sup> Keturah, who had six sons. At the age of 175, outliving Sarah by almost half a century, Abraham died, and Isaac and Ishmael buried him. His body was placed with Sarah's in the cave of Machpelah in Canaan where Abraham had purchased a burial place for his family. A man of renowned faith, he would forever be known as "the friend of God."

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **Knowing God's Will and Prayer**

How can we discover God's leading? Abraham and his servant model some principles that can help us to seek godly wisdom and guidance. As we continue our study on *New Beginnings*, let's look at some of biblical principles that instruct us in seeking God's best for our lives.

## **Lesson 8**

### ***JACOB AND ESAU***

#### **Genesis 25:19-27:40**

Isaac prayed for Rebekah, and after 20 years of barrenness, she became pregnant. It was a difficult pregnancy, and she prayed about the jostling going on inside. The Lord informed her that the twins she would have would father two nations, and the older son would serve the younger.

When the boys were born, Esau came out red and hairy, and Jacob followed hanging on to his brother's ankle. As they grew, the boys became very different. Esau loved to hunt, and Isaac, who liked the taste of wild game, favored Esau. Jacob was quiet and stayed closer to home. He became Rebekah's favorite.

One day, Esau came in famished, and flippantly, but under oath, sold his birthright<sup>1</sup> to Jacob in exchange for some bread and lentil stew. Since the promises of God that Isaac had inherited from Abraham were at the heart of the birthright, Esau's attitude showed that he was godless.<sup>2</sup> Esau did not care about God's purpose to bless the world through Abraham's offspring. As God had informed Rebekah, Jacob would naturally have been the one to inherit the birthright and carry out the spiritual purposes of the family. Things became complicated when Isaac's and Rebekah's favoritisms got in the way of waiting for God to work out His plans in His own way. Isaac, while knowing Esau's heart attitude toward God and the prediction given Rebekah, insisted on giving the spiritual blessing<sup>3</sup> to Esau. Rebekah overheard as her husband told Esau to go to the field to kill fresh game for a special meal before Isaac gave Esau the family blessing. Immediately, Rebekah contrived a plan whereby her favorite son, Jacob, would fool Isaac into thinking he was really Esau.<sup>4</sup> The plan worked, and Isaac unknowingly gave the blessing to Jacob instead of Esau.

When Esau came home and the truth became known, he wept and begged his father to bless him, too. Although Esau was ignorant of the sacredness of the blessing, he regretted missing its advantages. Esau hated Jacob for robbing him of both his birthright and his father's blessing, and from that point on his relationship with his mother could not have been good. Genesis 26 recounts three other significant happenings. First, Isaac tried to duplicate his father, Abraham's, scheme of protection in foreign lands. To protect his life, Isaac did as Abraham had done; he told the Canaanite king that Rebekah was really his sister. As with Abraham, God once again intervened to bring protection to the chosen family line.

The second event of Chapter 26 is God's encounter with Isaac to give him the promise of his father Abraham. Isaac responded with worship, the first personal response to God recorded about this patriarch.

The last part of Chapter 26 records the problems Isaac had with the surrounding farmers' jealousy of Isaac's prosperity. They continuously either stopped up or claimed Isaac's water wells. Isaac finally found relief as he settled near the well at Beersheba.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **Building Love: Overcoming Prejudices**

Sibling rivalry is common, but add to it parental partiality and the struggle can destroy the family. Isaac and Rebekah's story began with the joyful birth of twins. However, because of insensitivity toward God's leading in raising their sons, Isaac and Rebekah followed their own prejudices and ended up in a web of deceit, malice, and shattered family relationships.

If we are to create and enjoy an environment of love around our lives, we must guard against natural prejudices and favoritisms. Let's observe some guidelines that the Bible offers on the subject of building love by overcoming prejudices.

## **Lesson 9**

### ***JACOB IN EXILE***

#### **Genesis 27:41-30:24**

Jacob had succeeded in securing all of Esau's rights as firstborn, and Esau's frustration and disappointment quickly turned into a determination to kill Jacob as soon as their father died. To protect Jacob, Rebekah urged him to journey several hundred miles northeast to her homeland. Rebekah and Jacob told his father, Isaac, that Jacob was going to find a wife among Rebekah's relatives rather than in Canaan. Isaac blessed Jacob, who left for Paddan Aram with Rebekah's promise to send for him when Esau had cooled off.

The first night en route, the Lord visited Jacob in a dream. He promised to protect and bless Jacob, and to bless the world through his descendants as He had promised his grandfather, Abraham (cf. 12:2,3,7). When he awoke, Jacob was in awe that God had so appeared to him. He marked the place with a pillar and named it Bethel, meaning *house of God*. He made a vow that if God would provide for and protect him, and return him to his father's house safely, he would give him a tenth (tithes) of all he received from God. Upon arriving at a well in Paddan Aram, Jacob met his cousin, Rachel, and instantly fell in love with her. She was the daughter of his mother's brother, Laban. To get Rachel as his wife, he agreed to work seven years for Laban. The time went fast, but Laban pulled off a master deception by having the usual wedding feast for Rachel and Jacob, only to give his eldest daughter, Leah, to Jacob for the consummation. When Jacob discovered this the morning after, Laban's explanation was that it was not the custom to give the youngest daughter in marriage first. He agreed to give Rachel to Jacob, too, after the usual bridal week for Leah was over, and in return for another seven years of work. Jacob, who had been deceptive himself in getting his brother's birthright, had now ironically become the son-in-law of a master deceiver.

Probably because she was not attractive to him as well as because he had



been tricked into becoming her husband, Jacob did not love Leah. Rachel, on the other hand, was not able to give Jacob the children that Leah bore him. The women had a vicious competition over who could have the most children, either by maid or by self, in order to gain the most valuable position to Jacob. The naming of their children reflected their bitterness and rivalry toward each other.

Finally, Rachel was able to conceive. She named her son Joseph. Over seven years, Jacob's wives had eleven sons and one daughter: six sons and a daughter by Leah, two sons by her maid Zilpah, one son by Rachel, and two sons by her maid Bilbah.

Understandably, Jacob longed to escape Laban and return to his homeland. However, Laban schemed to keep Jacob longer. Through it all, God's promised protection and provision for Jacob were unfailing.

### ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

#### **Building Love: Dealing With Jealousy and Comparison**

Jealousy and comparison cover the pages of Jacob's life. Jacob was jealous of Esau; Rebekah was jealous for Jacob; Esau became jealous of Jacob; Leah was jealous of Rachel, then Rachel of Leah; finally, Laban became jealous of Jacob. Rebekah, Esau, Rachel, Leah, Laban, all join Jacob in the parade of victims of jealous thoughts.

We have all seen and perhaps experienced the destructive nature of envy and comparison around us. Jealousy can develop into seething hatred, causing fractured relationships and sometimes even murder. When jealousy is allowed to control a heart, it causes strife in a family, neighborhood or workplace. How can we control this common vice? In this lesson, we will look at what the Bible has to say about jealousy and comparison.

## **Lesson 10**

### ***JACOB AND LABAN***

#### **Genesis 30:25-31:55**

Although Jacob longed to go home, his father-in-law, Laban, had managed to keep him in Paddan Aram and impoverished. In fact, Laban did not want Jacob to leave because he had learned through a fortune teller that his own prosperity was the result of God's favor towards Jacob. To persuade him to stay longer, Laban asked Jacob to name his wages.

Jacob requested the off-colored animals which Laban's flocks produced as compensation. Laban readily agreed, and *that day*, while Jacob was working, Laban took every such animal out of his herds. He removed them to a safe distance and put them under the care of his sons. This low trick gave Jacob almost nothing with which to start his earnings.

In response, Jacob employed superstitious schemes having to do with prenatal influence and selective breeding in an effort to build his estate. In the end, however, the off-colored animals which the herds produced were so strong and numerous that only God could have been responsible.

Jacob's prosperity provoked the growing hostility of Laban and his sons, and in a dream, the Lord informed Jacob that it was time to return to his homeland. When Jacob told Leah and Rachel of the dream, they readily agreed to the move. They had long since lost respect for their father, who had charged Jacob 14 years of work for them, as well as deprived them of their rightful bridal inheritance.

So Jacob proceeded to leave Laban's territory without telling him. To add to

her father's fury, Rachel stole the household gods<sup>1</sup> as she left.

When Laban discovered these things, he and his relatives pursued Jacob and his party 300 miles, overtaking them in the hill country of Gilead. However, during the journey God warned Laban in a dream not to speak "either good or bad" to Jacob. This was so much as to say, "Don't say anything."<sup>2</sup>

While his dream persuaded Laban not to harm Jacob, he still took the opportunity to complain. Why was there no "farewell party," and who stole his household gods? After a futile search for the gods that Rachel had well-hidden in her camel saddle, both men aired their feelings. Jacob recalled Laban's unreasonable treatment over the past 20 years and gave God credit for his own prosperity in spite of the impossible circumstances. Laban, in his usual foul logic, said that everything—daughters, grandchildren and flocks—was rightfully his. Even so, he stated, he couldn't stop them from going (especially with the warning from God).

The two men then made a covenant, inviting the Lord to judge between them and promising never to harm the other. After a final meal and night together, Laban kissed and blessed his daughters and grandchildren and returned home.

Jacob was finally free of Laban and heading for home at last. Only one obstacle remained: meeting his brother Esau.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **Dealing With Resentment**

Few of us escape having at least one person in our lives who treats us with injustice while claiming integrity. Such behavior can be the most exasperating to deal with, and resentment is almost invariably our response. Though resentment can seem our just due, this little attitude feeds unhealthy emotions and actions. As in the story of Laban and Jacob, resentment can and should be brought to an end. As we continue our study of *New Beginnings*, we will observe keys to successfully coping with resentment.

## **Lesson 11**

### ***JACOB MEETS ESAU***

#### **Genesis 32-33**

It had been 20 years since Jacob left his homeland in Canaan, alone and empty-handed, fleeing from the hostility of his older twin brother, Esau. Jacob had schemed to take all his brother's rights as firstborn away from him, and Esau had planned to kill Jacob as soon as their father died. Jacob fled to Rebekah's homeland 300-400 miles northeast, hoping to find safety and a wife among his mother's family.

Upon returning to Canaan, he was the husband of not one, but two wives and two concubines, all of whom, with the exception of Rachel, he had not wanted. He had eleven sons and one daughter, and, because of God's blessing, he had become very wealthy.

He left the hostile region of his father-in-law, Laban, at peace with his wives' family. However, now he had to face what he assumed would be a hostile brother who had driven him away 20 years earlier.

When he initially left Canaan, the Lord and His angels appeared to Jacob to promise God's safekeeping and blessing on his sojourn in Aram (28:12-15). As Jacob traveled home, angels once again met the patriarch with the promise of God's protection. Encouraged by this encounter, Jacob sent messengers to tell Esau that he was coming, only to receive word that Esau was headed toward him with 400 men. In spite of God's promise, Jacob became fearful and distressed. He arranged to protect his family as much as

possible, prayed fervently for God's help, and set aside huge gifts of livestock for Esau. Jacob's herdsmen went ahead of Jacob and his family in hopes that the offering might appease Esau and soften his heart.

After sending everyone else across the river, Jacob spent the night wrestling with a man who renamed Jacob *Israel*, and crippled him in the hip joint. The man would give no name but said, "You have struggled with God and with man and have overcome" (32:28). He blessed Jacob as he left at daybreak, and Jacob recognized his encounter to have been with God Himself.<sup>1</sup>

Jacob and Esau met, and separated, in peace.<sup>2</sup> Esau *ran* to meet Jacob, and embraced him with kisses and tears. After meeting Jacob's family, and, at Jacob's insistence, taking the livestock gifts, Esau offered to accompany Jacob until he got home. Jacob encouraged his brother not to be bothered with the slow trip with all the women and children, and promised to come to Esau's home in Seir. With that, Esau started toward home that day. Jacob never went to Seir,<sup>3</sup> but instead bought some land for his tent outside of the Canaanite city of Shechem.

Jacob had learned about working with God through a struggle. Even so, greater challenges awaited him with his children, who had learned the art of deceit.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **Dealing with Stress**

All of us can relate to the desperate feelings that Jacob experienced as he prepared to face Esau again. The encounter could have spelled disaster for him and his family.

Many of our stresses are small daily ones. Sometimes, however, they are life-threatening. Regardless, we can learn from the story in our lesson today, as well as from other biblical sources, about how to work through stress successfully.

## **Lesson 12**

### ***MORE ABOUT JACOB***

#### **Genesis 34-36**

Although God had blessed Jacob and his family, their heritage was filled with deception on the part of Jacob, Rebekah and Laban. It is not surprising that deceit would emerge in Jacob's children. Genesis 34 records a horrible illustration of the predominant family weakness in action.

Rather than keep his promise to travel to Esau's home at Seir, Jacob settled near the Canaanite city of Shechem. Jacob and Leah's daughter, Dinah, was beautiful. Consequently, when she made a visit to the nearby city of Shechem, the son of the ruler there fell desperately in love with her. He forced Dinah to have sexual relations with him, an act which was, in Israelite terms, an outrage against the honor of Jacob's family.

Hamor, the young man's father, asked that the girl become his son's bride at any price, and welcomed intermarriage with Jacob's family. The marriage agreement required that all the men in Shechem be circumcised.

On the third day while the men of Shechem were still recovering from the circumcision, Jacob's sons Simeon and Levi killed every man in the city, then seized their families and possessions. It was an incredible act of violence for God's people to commit. Jacob's sons had acted like cruel pagans before the people of the land. Jacob rebuked them and prepared to move, having now become odious to his neighbors.

God commanded Jacob to return to Bethel and build an altar there to the Lord. Jacob had his household rid themselves of all foreign gods, purify themselves, and prepare to return to Bethel where God met with the patriarch many years before. There Jacob built an altar and worshiped. God once again affirmed his promises to build a nation from Jacob's descendants and give them the land of Canaan.

Bethel marked a turning point in Jacob's life. Rachel died while giving birth to Jacob's youngest son, Benjamin. She was buried near Bethlehem. After this, Reuben slept with Jacob's concubine, Bilhah, which cost him his birthright as the eldest son.<sup>1</sup> Then, after Jacob returned to Hebron where he had grown up, his aged father Isaac died, and together Esau and Jacob buried him.

The focus of the story now turns from Jacob to his sons, whose descendants were to become the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>2</sup>

### ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

#### **Coping With Disappointment and Losses**

Jacob had come to the godliest years of his life as well as the most difficult. His children had learned to compromise their integrity, causing Jacob much heartache. He also faced the loss of his mother, her life-long faithful nurse, Deborah (35:8; 24:59), his much-loved Rachel, and his father, Isaac. Although he had come to trust God, grief was very much a part of his experience.

Disappointment and losses, great and small, are an inescapable part of life. Even though we are wholly committed to God, past violation of biblical principles that have shaped the decision-making processes of others can bring deep disappointment. The death of ones we love can cause tremendous pain. The difference the Lord makes is that He is there to comfort us and to ultimately bring good out of the difficult situation. As we continue our study of *New Beginnings*, let's look at some promises that give hope in times of disappointment and loss.

## **PART 3**

### ***BEGINNINGS IN EGYPT***

Part 2 of our study ended with Jacob again living in Canaan. God had given him twelve sons, great wealth and a new name: Israel. His sons would become the heads of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel.

The focus of Part 3 is on Jacob's sons and particularly on Joseph. As Moses, the author of Genesis, continued to explain the Israelite heritage to those who had come through the exodus from slavery in Egypt, Joseph's experience was pivotal. Through his story, they would come to understand exactly how and why Jacob and his sons began their difficult sojourn in Egypt.

Although not mentioned as much as in earlier Genesis accounts, the hand of God is clearly seen in the historical drama of Genesis 37-50. As He sovereignly worked to save Jacob's offspring from famine, He also accomplished the task of reuniting them as a family. It is one of the most moving documentaries in the Bible.

## **Lesson 1**

## ***JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS***

### **Genesis 37-38**

As each of his parents had done, Jacob demonstrated open favoritism toward one of his children. The favored son was Joseph, the older son of Rachel. Jacob made Joseph a beautiful robe that announced his partiality to everyone in the family. Adding insult to injury, Joseph flaunted two prophetic dreams he had experienced in which the entire family bowed down to him. Furthermore, Joseph was a "good" boy, obedient, honest and dependable. It is not surprising that many of his eleven brothers, two of which were brutal enough to massacre an entire town of innocent men (Genesis 34), were ready to kill Joseph, too.

One day Jacob sent Joseph, only 17 years old, to check on his brothers in the fields. When he finally reached them near Dothan, they had seen him coming and plotted his death. Reuben tried to save Joseph by suggesting that they put him in a cistern, hoping to return later and rescue him. Judah, also trying to save Joseph, finally convinced his brothers to sell Joseph as a slave to a passing caravan en route to Egypt.

With this, Joseph found himself in the company of Ishmaelites (distant cousins) and soon became a slave in the Egyptian family of Potiphar. Back at home, Reuben (who as eldest was responsible for Joseph) and his brothers faced their father with Joseph's coat smeared with goat's blood. They told a tale that broke their father's heart and once again duplicated the deceit of Jacob in his youth.<sup>1</sup>

The story of this rowdy bunch continues as Judah chose to leave home and marry a pagan Canaanite woman. They had three sons, two of which, Er and Onan, died without leaving children. As was the levirate marriage custom,<sup>2</sup> Judah promised Tamar, the wife of Er and then Onan, that she could marry his third son, Shelah, when he became old enough.

With time, however, it became evident that Judah did not intend to keep his promise to give Shelah to Tamar. Desperate to obtain offspring, Tamar posed as a Canaanite religious prostitute and tricked Judah into having relations with her. Now Tamar was still considered part of Judah's family, and when he learned of her pregnancy, he ordered her death. He retracted the sentence, however, when she produced evidence that he was the father. Tamar had twins, who continued Judah's line.<sup>3</sup>

### ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

#### **Handling Broken Relationships**

Jacob's favoritism, Joseph's insensitivity, and his brothers' jealousy worked together to shatter this family. Deceit also breaks the strongest relationship bonds, and so the brothers lived with their lie to their father.

One of the most difficult things we can experience is a close relationship that is somehow broken. Thus far in our study, we have looked at many biblical principles related to building healthy relationships. In our lesson today, we will make a broad sweep of many of these principles as we discover some causes of broken relationships, and how to handle broken relationships with integrity.

## **Lesson 2**

### ***JOSEPH IN BONDAGE***

#### **Genesis 39-40**

While Joseph may have lacked diplomacy in dealing with his brothers, he proved to be one of the Bible's most unblemished characters. He was

unusually handsome, exceptionally gifted at leadership, able to make the most of any situation, and steadfastly committed to God. There is much to be learned from Joseph's perseverance, faith, and forgiveness. His life proves that God honors those who honor Him, and that God is sovereign over the worst events in our lives.

In Lesson 1, we saw Joseph kidnapped by his brothers and sold to a passing caravan of Ishmaelites en route to Egypt. He was forced to give up the richly ornamented robe his father had made for him and wear slave clothes in the home of an Egyptian royal official named Potiphar. When it became obvious to Potiphar that the Lord was with Joseph, blessing everything he did, he put Joseph in charge of managing his entire household.

Problems began when Potiphar's wife became obsessed with the desire to sleep with Joseph. Day after day, she approached him, only to be ignored. Joseph explained to her that he could not betray Potiphar's trust, nor could he sin against God in that way.

Nevertheless, one day when no one was in the house, Potiphar's wife begged Joseph to come to her, grabbing his cloak, which he left with her as he fled. In a rage, she called all the servants and tried to lead them and her husband to believe Joseph had tried to abduct her. Potiphar was enraged at the report but may not have been altogether convinced of its truth because rather than put Joseph to death, he had him confined to one of the better prisons in the area.

In prison, the Lord gave Joseph favor with the warden, who entrusted Joseph with oversight of the whole prison.

After some time, the royal cupbearer<sup>1</sup> and the baker, both of whom had offended Pharaoh, ended up under Joseph's care in the prison. While confined, the cupbearer and the baker both experienced very disturbing dreams. Upon seeing their downcast state, Joseph offered to obtain God's help in interpreting their dreams. He predicted that the cupbearer would go back to work and that the baker would be hanged. Joseph asked the cupbearer to help get him out of prison when the man returned to his position next to the king.

Joseph's predictions did come to pass, but the cupbearer forgot Joseph's plight in the prison.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **Performing Under Pressure**

Many of us have faced times when we just "couldn't seem to win for losing." Joseph went from the heights of favor in his father's home to the humiliation of imprisonment, and there was no foreseeable end to the situation.

Joseph's life depended on his decisions and attitudes in the midst of the pressures. Let's observe his right choices as well as some biblical principles that direct us in performing under pressure.

## **Lesson 3**

### ***JOSEPH THE PRIME MINISTER***

#### **Genesis 41-42**

Joseph had been in prison for some time when he helped the imprisoned cupbearer and baker interpret their dreams. The cupbearer had promised that after his release and reinstatement to position next to the king, he would use

his influence to help Joseph. Instead, the cupbearer forgot about him. Two years later, Pharaoh had a dream that none of his wise men could interpret. The cupbearer then remembered Joseph's incredible ability and recommended him to Pharaoh. Immediately Joseph was taken from the prison, made presentable, and brought before the king. As with the cupbearer and baker, Joseph gave credit to God for any accurate interpretation he might be able to give Pharaoh. The dream, he declared, was a prediction of seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of severe famine in the land. This warning from God was accompanied by a plan: Joseph recommended that Pharaoh place a wise and discerning man in charge of the land to oversee the storage of food during the period of plenty and the distribution of food during the period of famine. Pharaoh had observed God's Spirit in Joseph, so he and his officials chose Joseph to be the overseer.<sup>1</sup> Joseph was inaugurated with fanfare, many gifts, an Egyptian name, and a wife named Asenath. He was 30 years old when he became an Egyptian prime minister and had been away from home for 13 years. With his wife Asenath, Joseph had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. The famine Joseph had predicted affected not only Egypt but also the entire known world. Countries everywhere came to Egypt to buy corn. So twenty years after Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery (37:2;41:46), ten of them faced Joseph again, now in desperate need of food. Jacob had sent all except Joseph's true brother, Benjamin, to buy grain in Egypt. They bowed down before Joseph, now the most powerful figure in the land of Egypt apart from Pharaoh. He recognized his brothers, but because of his language, dress, and official bearing, his brothers did not recognize him. Remembering his dreams (Genesis 37:5-9), Joseph devised a plan to test their trustworthiness and to see his younger brother, Benjamin. He accused the men of being spies and held Simeon, traditionally believed to be the cruelest of all the brothers, in prison. He sent the other nine home to get Benjamin as proof that their story was true and that they were not spies.<sup>2</sup> In their own language, which they did not know Joseph understood, the brothers discussed their remorse over their hostility toward Joseph years before. They felt they were being recompensed for the evil they had done by this difficult turn of events. When he saw their repentant hearts, Joseph turned away to weep. When he came back, he had Simeon bound before them and sent them on their way. As his men were loading the grain purchased by his brothers, Joseph ordered them to put each brother's silver back in his sack. When they stopped for the night, Joseph's brothers found all the money they had paid for grain and were puzzled and afraid. Upon returning home, they told their father, Jacob, all that had happened with the "lord over the land" in Egypt. Jacob was overwhelmed and refused to let Benjamin go with them to retrieve Simeon and obtain additional grain.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **In the World, Not of It**

Although Jacob's twelve sons were split by jealousy and selfishness, God had His hand on them to bless them just as He had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 12:2,3; 26:2-5; 28:13-15). Regardless of how they responded to God, they all knew of their calling as His chosen family. While it is difficult to discern the individual character of many of the brothers, the character of Joseph is becoming clearer as we follow his life in Egypt. Even though his experience in this foreign land seemed hopeless for many years, he finally began to see the fruits of his faithfulness to God's purposes.

If we have opened our lives to God through Christ, we, as Joseph, are set apart for God's purposes. The biblical word for this concept is *sanctification*. Let's make some observations from Joseph's life regarding how we can successfully pursue God's purposes in the world around us.

## Lesson 4

### ***REUNITED FAMILY***

#### **Genesis 43:1-45:15**

When Jacob and his family had eaten all the grain they bought in Egypt, Jacob instructed his sons to go back to Egypt to buy more food. The men reminded their father that they could not go back without Benjamin, who the governor, alias Joseph, had demanded to see to prove they were not spies. Only when Judah pledged his own life to guarantee the safe return of Benjamin did Jacob finally consent to letting his youngest son go. They left with twice the silver they had taken before (to repay what had been put back in their packs when they left Egypt before and to buy more food). They also took gifts of honey, nuts, and spices for the governor. When they arrived in Egypt, they found themselves invited to the governor's house to dine. They didn't know what to expect from the grand vizier of Egypt, and when Joseph entered the room, they bowed low before him. Joseph was so moved by the sight of his younger brother, Benjamin, that he had to leave the room to cry and compose himself. Joseph dined apart from them according to Egyptian custom,<sup>1</sup> and had the brothers seated before him in order of their age, which amazed them. Curiously, Benjamin was served five times as much food as the others.

The next morning, as they were preparing to leave, Joseph devised a final test for his brothers. He had his silver cup put in Benjamin's sack, framing him as a thief in order to take him prisoner. As they set out, Joseph had all of them arrested, and when the goblet was found in Benjamin's sack, they were speechless with fear and despair. Judah spoke for himself and his brothers. Offering no excuse or denial, he simply plead with this great Egyptian official for the life and freedom of Benjamin. He explained the story of his father's grief over the loss of Benjamin's brother, and assured him that grief would kill Jacob if Benjamin did not return. Judah begged to stay in Benjamin's stead to save him from seeing their father in misery once again.<sup>2</sup> In a moment, Joseph sent all attendants from the room, and in his boyhood tongue revealed himself to his brothers. He opened his heart and wept so loudly that word about it spread to Pharaoh's house. Joseph calmed his brothers' fears and relieved their guilt about the terrible deed of selling him into slavery. He helped them see that God had allowed him to go to Egypt to prepare a way of deliverance for Jacob's family during the terrible famine to come. God was preserving this family that He had promised would one day be a source of blessing to the whole world.

After this, Joseph instructed his brothers to bring their father and families to the land of Goshen<sup>3</sup> in Egypt where he could take care of them, explaining that the famine would last another five years. Joseph sent wagons with them for the return trip to Egypt, and filled them with grain, gifts and supplies of all kinds.

This story stands as one of the most dramatic biblical accounts as well as a vivid picture of God's ability to redeem the worst of situations. The



sovereign hand of God used the ugly crimes against Joseph to ultimately reunite and restore Jacob's fractured family and deliver His chosen people from famine.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **Controlling Those Emotions**

Undoubtedly, Joseph had lots of mixed emotions as he saw his brothers for the first time since they sold him into slavery 20 years earlier. Yet his response opened the way for God's purposes to continue to unfold.

All of us deal with various emotions and at times experience overwhelming circumstances. In this lesson, we will look at biblical truths that can help us control our emotions and express our feelings in a positive way.

## **Lesson 5**

### ***JACOB IN EGYPT***

#### **Genesis 45:16-47:31**

When Pharaoh and his officials heard that Joseph's brothers had come to Egypt, he graciously invited them all to move from Canaan to enjoy every comfort Egypt could give them. The brothers, loaded with gifts and provisions, returned to tell their father Jacob the whole truth.

Jacob was at first stunned, then overjoyed by the news that his much loved son Joseph was not only alive, but prime minister in Egypt. He immediately set out for that land with all his offspring<sup>1</sup> and possessions, stopping only to worship at Beersheba.<sup>2</sup> There, in a vision, God promised to greatly increase Jacob's descendants in Egypt and return them someday to Canaan.<sup>3</sup> He also revealed that Joseph, whom Jacob had not seen in 23 years, would close Jacob's eyes when he died.

When they all approached Goshen, where they had been directed to go, Joseph arrived in his chariot to meet his father. All Joseph could do was embrace his father and cry for a long time. It was a day of comfort and rejoicing that ended many years of grief for Jacob. Obvious to all was the fact that God had guided their family through difficult and baffling times to a good end.

After this, Joseph helped his brothers approach Pharaoh to request Goshen, the best grazing land in Egypt, where they were permitted to settle. In the remaining years of the famine, people all over Egypt and Canaan bought grain from Joseph, first with money, then with livestock, then with land. Finally they sold themselves into slavery to Pharaoh. It became a truly feudal system where serfs paid 20% of their produce in exchange for more seed. In the midst of this, Joseph's relatives thrived and multiplied. God was building Israel's nation in Egypt as He had promised.

In his old age, after 17 years of peace and plenty in Egypt, Jacob called Joseph to himself and had Joseph promise to take him back to Canaan for burial. Obviously, he fully believed that in time God would fulfill his promise to take his family back to Canaan to inherit that land. As Jacob "worshiped God as he leaned on his staff," there was joy in his heart as he contemplated the faithfulness of God. Years of life and growing in faith had made great changes in this man's character.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **The Beauty of Age**

We have followed the life of Jacob from the day he was born hanging onto

his twin brother's heel. Through years of deceitfulness and selfishness, painful growth and hardship, spiritual immaturity and then maturity, we finally see him enjoy 17 years of peace in Egypt. As he approached his death, he was a man of faith, clearly committed to God's good purposes and ready to meet his heavenly Father.

Most of us follow a similar pilgrimage through life and one day realize our time left in this world is short. There are no easy answers for the complex problems that can come with aging. But if we face the challenges of our last years with a godly spirit, we can continue to create a healthy and constructive atmosphere around us.

In many ways, western culture puts a premium on being young. Certainly youth has its advantages, but Jacob's final years show that some inner qualities come only with age. Let's look at some of the qualities that can give us increased beauty as we get older.

## **Lesson 6**

### ***THE BLESSINGS OF JACOB***

#### **Genesis 48-49**

Before his death, Jacob adopted Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. In essence, this gave Joseph the double portion birthright in the family and instantly gave Joseph's sons equal status with Jacob's first two sons, Reuben and Simeon. It also protected Joseph's sons from being absorbed into their native Egyptian culture, which would have precluded Joseph from inheritance in the promises of God for Israel.

As Joseph brought his sons to be blessed by Jacob<sup>1</sup> before his death, Jacob predicted Ephraim would be superior to his older brother Manasseh. Jacob then blessed Joseph, referring to the God of his forefathers, the God who shepherded him, and the "Angel" who had delivered him from all harm. Later in Joseph's blessing, Jacob spoke of "the Mighty One of Jacob, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel." Through the many mistakes and heartaches of his life, Jacob had grown to know God in ways his forefathers perhaps had not.

Jacob then called each of his twelve sons in turn to his bedside for final words of blessing, censure, or curse. Each of the twelve would be a founding father of the twelve tribes of Israel, and Jacob prophesied to each one something about the future of their tribe that in many cases had to do with their present character. Most of these prophecies<sup>3</sup> were fulfilled several hundred years later after the Israelites had taken over the promised land of Canaan.

Reuben, his firstborn, had forfeited his birthright because of his immoral act in Genesis 35:22. Reuben's descendants would experience turbulence and indecisiveness rather than excelling as they might have done. Simeon and Levi were cursed for their fierce anger and violence and would be dispersed in Israel.<sup>4</sup> Judah's tribe would be superior, enjoying wealth and producing many kings in Israel.<sup>5</sup> Zebulun would have access to the sea and trade. The tribe of Dan would be very dangerous to its foes, but would never be strong spiritually. Gad would continually be attacked by desert tribes in the land of Canaan and would protect the nation of Israel. Asher would be prosperous and produce delicacies for kings' tables. Naphtali would love freedom and bear some eloquent spiritual leaders of Israel. Benjamin, described as a fierce and cruel wolf, had descendants such as Ehud and Saul who were warlike and ruthless.

Jacob's greatest praise was given Joseph (49:22-26), whose vision and

moral and spiritual strength were exemplary. As a son, brother, slave and administrator, he demonstrated an unwavering loyalty to God. Jacob predicted that bitter jealousy and hostility would be directed toward him and his offspring, but that God would give them certain victory. Joseph would always be “a prince among his brothers,” meaning “one set apart.” In his last words, Jacob instructed the rest of his sons, as he had Joseph earlier, to bury his remains in Canaan alongside Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Leah in the place Abraham had purchased. Jacob then breathed his last, as had his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham, with the assurance that the God who had faithfully directed his life would continue to build a nation from Abraham’s offspring, a nation that would someday inhabit Canaan and bring blessing to the entire world.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **Confronting Death and Pain**

Joseph hurt deeply over the death of his father. Jacob had probably shown him the greatest love of anyone over his lifetime, and had no doubt introduced him to faith in God. At any rate, nothing could have prepared Joseph for his death.

Most of us will grieve at some point over the loss of a loved one or when facing our own death. The Bible speaks about the pain of death. Genesis 2 and 3 explain death’s origin in the rebellious choices of man. The good news is that God has provided full redemption for our rebellion and a life to come where death is “swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:53).

Let’s look at some biblical perspectives that offer relief and hope when confronting death and pain.

## **Lesson 7**

### ***JOSEPH’S LAST YEARS***

#### **Genesis 50**

After drawing his sons near for final words, Jacob breathed his last. Joseph threw himself on his much loved father in grief, weeping and kissing him. After the embalming, Joseph arranged with the Pharaoh to take Jacob, as he had requested, to be buried in the cave of Abraham in Canaan. Mourning followed for 70 days, and Jacob’s family and all of Pharaoh’s officials went to Canaan for the burial.

After returning to Egypt, Joseph’s brothers feared what he might do to them now that their father was dead. Joseph wept when he received a contrived message from them claiming that their father had requested Joseph forgive them for their cruel act of selling him into Egyptian bondage years before. After this, they came and threw themselves at his feet, offering themselves to be his slaves. It seems they still did not comprehend his forgiveness.

In response, Joseph spoke kindly to them, assuring them of his continued care and reminding them that the hand of God had been in all that had happened. “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (50:20). His statement held a description of the redeeming grace of God in the midst of human error.

At 110 years old, Joseph died in Egypt. He had made his brothers promise to keep his coffin and carry it back with them when they returned to Canaan.

Four hundred years later, as the Israelites journeyed back to Canaan some three million strong, Joseph’s coffin was kept in the camp. It was a constant reminder of God’s sovereign hand working out His purposes for Israel.

After Joseph's death, a new pharaoh would come to power who, not knowing Joseph, would bring cruel slavery upon the rapidly growing Israelite nation in Egypt. But after 400 years, God would raise up a man named Moses to take the burden of leadership and guide these people out of Egyptian tyranny.

The eternal God, who stands outside of time and holds all power and wisdom, would continue to move toward His promise to make Abraham's offspring a nation that would one day bring blessing to the whole world.

## ***BUILDING ON THE BASICS***

### **The Power of Forgiveness**

Genesis closes (37-50) with one of the most moving stories in the Bible. After Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt by hostile and jealous brothers, a famine reunited the family after 23 years of separation. Joseph, who had become Pharaoh's right hand man, had all his father's descendants move to Egypt where he could care for them. He freely forgave his brothers, believing God had used their actions to put him in a position to help many people—especially his family—through the famine.

After his father's death, however, his brothers still did not trust Joseph or appreciate his kindly spirit toward them. In the face of this attitude, Joseph again chose to forgive them and abundantly meet their needs.

So it is with God's love. In spite of our mistakes, rebellion, lack of trust, or ungratefulness, God continues to pursue us. The pages of Genesis show God moving patiently and steadily toward creating a nation that would bring blessing to the entire world. Israel would preserve the Scriptures and the knowledge of the one true God. Most importantly, from their midst would come Jesus, the Messiah, who would take the death penalty for the rebellion of man that originated in Genesis 2 and 3. Because of God's forgiving spirit, we can know Him personally as we choose to open our hearts to Him.

In concluding our study of Genesis, it is appropriate that we make some final observations about one of the most powerful biblical principles--forgiveness.

## **Afterward**

Moses wrote Genesis to explain to the Israelites their roots as they journeyed back to the promised land of Canaan from Egypt after 400 years of bondage. Genesis helped them understand, as we can today, how man fell, but how God immediately began to work out a plan to bring people back to Himself. God called one man, Abraham, to begin a nation that would bring knowledge of Him and blessing to the world.

As Genesis closes, the curtain is drawn on the drama of Abraham's *family*, with twelve small tribes founded and settled temporarily in Egypt. Exodus begins 400 years later, with the stage set and the curtain opening on the drama of a *nation* as God continues to move in history to provide new beginnings for us all.

## **Easy Breakdown of Genesis**

### **I. Beginnings of Mankind Genesis 1-11**

**Creation, Fall, Flood, Babel**

### **II. History of the Founding Fathers of Israel Genesis 12-50**

**Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph**

### **The Tribes of Israel**

*Fathers of the*

*tribes of Israel*

*Wives in italic* **Reuben**

**Simeon**

**Abraham Levi\*\*\***

*Leah* **Judah**

*Sarah* **Isaachar**

*Rebekah* **Zebulun**

**Isaac**

**Jacob** *Zilpah* **Gad**

(Israel)\* **Asher**

*Bilhah* **Dan**

**Naphtali**

*Rachel*

**Joseph\*\***

**Benjamin**

\*Jacob was renamed *Israel* by God **Ephraim** (Genesis 32:28;35:10). Sometimes the **Manasseh** nation of Israel is referred to as Jacob by Old Testament writers.

\*\*When Jacob adopted Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph became the father of two tribes of Israel.

\*\*\*The Levites became the priests of Israel, did not own property in Canaan, therefore were not among the traditional 12 landowning tribes of Israel. They were in 48 towns scattered throughout the promised land (Joshua 21).