

Points to Ponder

Genesis 1

- “In the beginning, God created...” Logically, either the universe has always been here, or it was created. But, we cannot go back in time to measure it, so we need another means by which to decide which is true. Bottom line, if a Creator exists, that Creator must communicate with us to let us know the purpose of existence. By communicating in a way that can be physically verified, God proves His own existence, His nature, and His purpose.
- Angels already existed when our universe was created (Job 38:7).
- “Let there be light.” Note that God created photons before creating the sources of those photons. If God had created the sources first (the stars), then new stars would be appearing in the sky all the time as their photons first reached us.
- “So the evening and the morning were the first day.” We now know how God accomplished the “evening and morning” phenomenon: the rotation of the earth. This was known in Moses’ day, also. The Egyptians were accomplished astronomers.
- The “firmament” is the sky. Some of the water stayed in the seas, some was in the clouds.
- God did not count on evolution or immense periods of time to accomplish His creation. Instead, He made massive changes each day.
- God called the results accomplished in each day, “Good.” God gets to decide what “good” is.
- “Let Us make man in Our image.” Remember, the angels were present and assisted in the work. So, the easiest explanation for the plural pronouns is that God included the angels in His statement. The image to which God referred, obviously, was not the physical form of Adam, since God and angels are spirits, not made of atoms and molecules. So, the resemblance between God and people is that they both have eternal spirits. The animals do not.
- 1:27 mentions the creation of male and female on the sixth day. 2:21 – 24 gives more detail. The same is true of the general statement about the mammals and reptiles in 1:24. More detail is given in 2:19 – 20.
- 1:29 – 30 mentions only herbivores. The eating of meat (carnivores) is not mentioned until after the Flood (9:3).

Genesis 2

- God rested on the seventh day. The author of Hebrews made the point that God rested from His work of creation, and that it was complete. God was not just taking a day off and would continue creating later (Hebrews 4:3 – 4).
- In 2:3, “God said good things about the seventh and reserved it for godly purposes because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” Not until the Law of Moses (2667 years later) did God tell the Israelites (and no one else) to do no work on the seventh day. However, God appears to have remembered that day Himself.
- 2:4 begins a recounting of the last part of the creation story, this time focusing on the role of humans.
- 2:5 – 6 reveals that rain was not begun in days 2 through 6, rather a mist watered the ground. The first mention of rain is in 7:4, as Noah is preparing the ark, more than 1600 years later. We do not know if rain began before that.
- 2:8 Eden was special. The rest of the world was already planted; Eden was better.

- 2:9 The Tree of Life is mentioned here and 3:22 and Proverbs 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; and 15:4 and Revelation 2:7; 22:2,14,19. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is only in this chapter. The Proverbs references are all figurative, the Tree of Life being compared to possessing wisdom, demonstrating the fruit of righteousness, the joy of hope when it is realized, speaking profitably. The Revelation citations are about the actual Tree of Life in heaven.
- Certainly, all the plants had life cycles because they were consumed as food. It is safe to assume that the animals also were not immortal, since they were to multiply, which implies growth. The end of growth is death. So, it is likely that Adam and Eve were physically mortal when they were created. Otherwise, the Tree of Life would have no purpose.
- The four rivers mentioned in 2:10-14 certainly were changed during the Flood, so there is no point in identifying them and trying to find the original Eden.
- 2:15, God expected Adam to work, not just relax and eat.
- 2:17, God prohibited eating of one tree. The death mentioned there is spiritual death, which will become the center of Satan's deception (Romans 5:12 – 21). Obviously, Adam did not die physically in the day in which he ate of that tree.
- 2:18 – 25, God first had Adam name all the animals. God's point was not to obtain names, which God could have done for Himself, but rather to prove to Adam that he had a need for a companion. By the way, Muhammed, in the Quran, changes the story slightly, saying that God told Adam what the names should be. Muhammed taught fate, predestination, an Arabic version of Calvinism (800 years before John Calvin). He realized that letting Adam name the animals meant that Adam had free will, so Muhammed changed the paragraph to suit his theory.
- 2:24, This line (cited in Matthew 19:4, Mark 10:6 – 8, 1 Corinthians 6:16) is advice from Moses to his society (Israel), not part of God's advice to Adam, since Adam and Eve had no earthly father or mother.
- 2:25 illustrates the innocence of Adam and Eve.

Genesis 3

- 3:1 The serpent is not identified as Satan in this chapter. However, Paul references 3:15 in Romans 16:20. John referenced the "serpent of old" in Revelation 12:9 and 20:2. And, ancient rabbis came to the same conclusion long before the time of Jesus. Interestingly, a snake spoke to Eve, and she not only found that fairly normal, but also answered back.
- 3:2 – 3, Eve's response was not quite accurate (2:16 – 17), leaving out "in the day you eat of it" and adding "nor shall you touch it."
- 3:4 – 6, The serpent's deception turned on the meaning of "die." God meant spiritual death (see Romans 5:12 – 21). If Paul meant physical death, then Satan introduced something that Jesus did not fix. But, the deception followed by the appeal to vanity (to be as knowledgeable as God) was sufficient to get Eve to violate her only rule.
- 3:7 – 8, Immediately, Adam and Eve's innocence was gone. Not only did they feel the need to cover themselves, implying a knowledge of the evil side of nudity, but also they tried to hide from God. No thinking person would ever think that hiding from God would be successful.
- 3:9 – 13, Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the serpent. Sinners typically do not want to take responsibility for their own mistakes.

- 3:14 – 15, The serpent apparently lost legs, if since crawling on its belly was part of his curse. Further, people and snakes would always be enemies. Paul verified that 3:15 referred to the Messiah in Romans 16:20. Although Satan would cause some harm to the Messiah, the Messiah would inflict far greater damage. In the New Testament, some of that damage was exile from heaven (Revelation 12:12), being deposed as prince of this world (Revelation 1:5), no longer having the fear of death to control people (Hebrews 2:15), not being able to overcome the faithful (Ephesians 6:11, James 4:7, 1 John 3:8, 4:4).
- 3:16, Part of Eve's curse apparently was genetically inherited (pain in childbirth). And, despite the promised pain, she would have desire for her husband and have children anyway. And, finally, part of the curse was suffering under male leadership. In the church, this has been made more palatable by changing the reason for male leadership to modeling the behavior of Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:21 – 33).
- 3:17 – 19, Adam's curse was difficulty with growing food. This was reversed after the Flood (Genesis 5:29 and 8:21).
- 3:21, God made clothing for Adam and Eve from animal skins, which implies that animals did die in the Garden.
- 3:22 – 24, The Tree of Life was in the Garden, presumably so that Adam and Eve could eat of it and reverse the effects of aging. Since they were now separated from God by sin, God decided to build an illustration of that separation by separating them from the Tree of Life so that they would, at some point, die physically. Note that the part of the world outside of Eden had already been built, since God ceased His creative work on Day 6 (Hebrews 4:3 – 4). To prevent their return, God stationed an angel with a flaming sword at the boundary. Eden would have been overwhelmed and permanently changed in the Flood, so it no longer exists on earth. The angel does not need to keep guarding it.

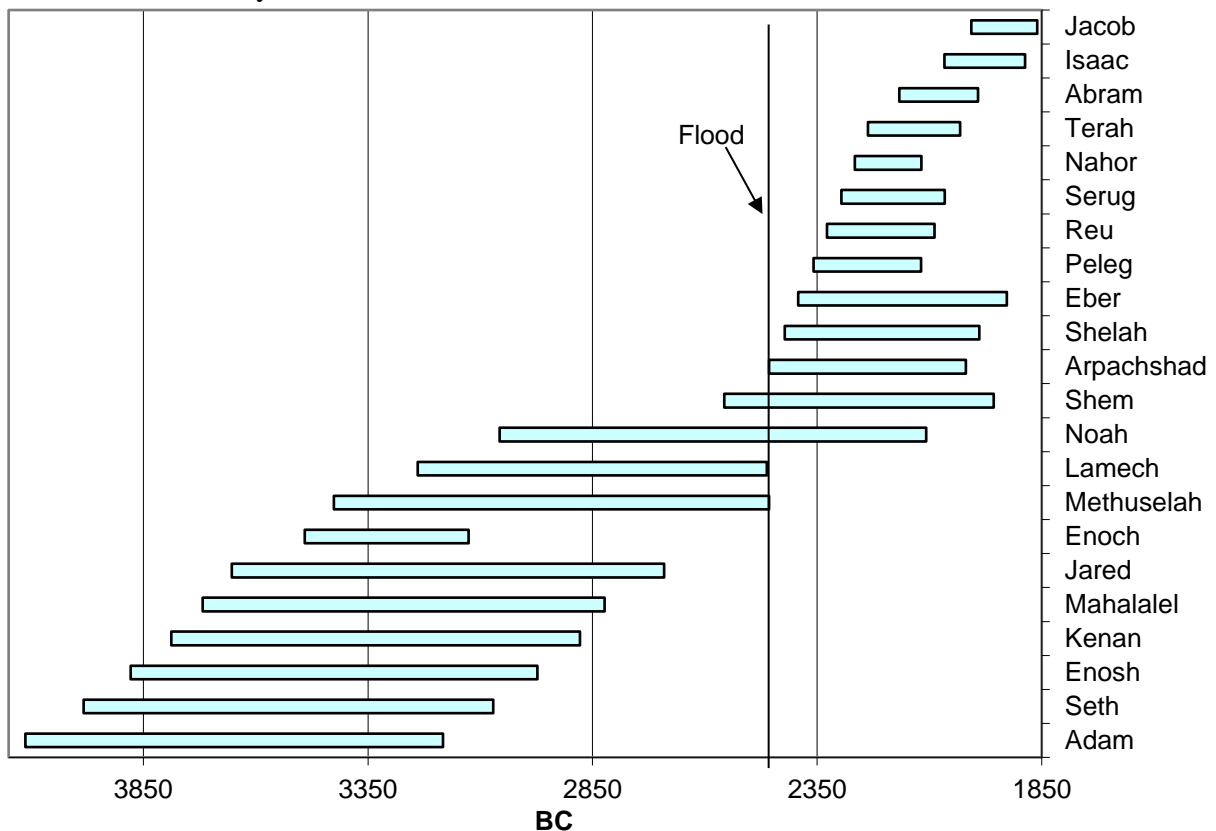
Genesis 4

- 4:1 – 5, Some have taught that Cain's sacrifice was rejected because it had no blood. First, the context does not support that conclusion. Second, 1 John 3:12 says that Cain's sacrifice was rejected because his works were evil whereas Abel's were righteous. This event is also mentioned in Hebrews 11:4 and 12:24, and Jude 11.
- 4:7, God counselled Cain that he was capable of overcoming temptation.
- 4:8, so, Cain killed Abel out of jealousy.
- 4:9, Abel's reply was sarcastic, not a real question.
- 4:10, God already knew what Cain had done because God knows all that happens on earth. God's question in verse 9 was asked to see if Cain would confess or lie.
- 4:12, Farming was already difficult due to Adam's curse (3:17 – 19). For Cain, the difficulty would be even greater. As a result, Cain and his people would be nomads.
- 4:14, Cain's assessment was partly right, and partly self-serving. God did not say that He was hiding His face from Cain. His fear of being killed (presumably by some of the descendant of Adam and Eve) was perhaps reasonable, based on how God reacted. But, overall, Cain made it sound like God was the problem, not his murder of Abel.
- 4:15, To calm down Cain, God promised that he would be safe for two reasons: a very high penalty was set for anyone who killed Cain, plus God put a mark on Cain to warn others of that high penalty. Note: the mark of Cain expired when Cain finally died. The Bible does not give his age at his death.

- 4:17, Cain's wife was his sister. No people other than descendants of Adam and Eve were on earth.
- 4:18 – 24, The descendants of Cain were geographically close enough to Adam and Eve that the "firsts" listed in this paragraph were known. In 6:2 is noted that the descendants of Cain intermarried with the other descendants of Adam and Eve. The poem of Lamech illustrates that the people of Cain were self-centered and violent.
- 4:25 – 26, Eve bore Seth. She had far more than three children (5:4). Apparently, Adam and Eve's relationship with God was strained. But, their grandson Enosh got things back on track for part of humanity.

Genesis 5

- The following chart shows the times when the people from Adam to Jacob. Note that Lamech and Methuselah died in the year of the Flood. The text does not say if they drowned or if they died of other causes before the Flood started.



- 5:23 – 24, Enoch is mentioned in Hebrews 11:5 and Jude 14. In Hebrews is confirmation that Enoch did not die physically, but was taken up (like Elijah). Jude recorded that Enoch was a prophet. However, the Book of Enoch is a fraud (not produced by an inspired writer).
- 5:29, At Noah's birth, he was named Rest, meaning that the faithful people of the day wanted relief from God's curse on agriculture (3:17 – 19). The prayer was answered in 8:21, after the Flood had abated and Noah sacrificed.
- 5:32, Among all those recorded in the Bible, Noah was the oldest, by more than three centuries, to become a father for the first time.

Genesis 6

- 6:1 – 2, The sons of God were the descendants of Seth. The daughters of men were the descendants of Cain. Many have taught that the sons of God were angels, but Jesus said that such is not the case, since angels “neither marry nor are given in marriage.” (Matthew 22:30) When the descendants of Seth (who “called on the name of the Lord,” 4:26) intermarried with the descendants of Cain (who “went out from the presence of the Lord,” 4:16), the righteous did not prevail, but the evil.
- 6:3, God determined that the typical lifespan needed to be shorter. After the Flood, the ages of typical people began to drop to God’s desired level. Actuarially, people today who reach 114 rarely reach 115.
- 6:4, This does not say that the offspring of Seth’s and Cain’s lines produced giants. There were giants both before and after. However, those mixed offspring included a disproportionate percentage of those who did great things.
- 6:5 – 8, After the mixing of Seth’s and Cain’s line, the proportion of those who “called on the name of the Lord” became too small for God’s plan to work, so He needed to restart with a faithful person. Apparently, Noah was the only one. The faithfulness of his sons and their wives is not mentioned, but the selection of Noah included his family. Note that verse 6 shows that God does not know the future. God was grieved at the way mankind had turned out. If one knows the outcome in advance, one cannot legitimately be grieved or sorry.
- 6:9 – 13, God announced His intention to Noah.
- 6:14 – 16, a cubit is commonly believed to have been about 18 inches or 46 cm. So, the ark was fairly large, but not massive. For example, a typical cruise ship today is more than twice that size. So, Noah could not have brought two of each unclean animal species and seven of each clean animal species (7:2), but rather representatives of each genus or family that would then breed into the multitudes of species we have today. Since God sent the animals to Noah rather than Noah having to hunt them all down (7:15), the right selection was made.
- 6:18, Eight persons were on the ark (as noted in 1 Peter 3:20). Interestingly, the Chinese character for eight is a drawing of a boat.
- 6:21, In addition to building the ark, Noah collected sufficient food for his family and all the animals. The text does not mention whether God told Noah how long they would be on the boat, which would affect the amount of food needed.

Genesis 7

- 7:2 – 3, Although the generalization is made in 6:19 and 7:9 that there were two of each animal, clearly there were more than two of all the clean animals. Since Noah sacrificed as soon as he got off the ark (8:20), this is a good thing, or there would have been not been enough clean animals left to reproduce.
- 7:4 – 10, Noah received warning a week in advance, and it sounds like the eight humans and the animals all boarded early in that period.
- 7:11, The details of month and day allow us to calculate exactly how long Noah was on the ark. Note that the Flood was not just the result of rain, but also of “all the fountains of the deep” being broken up. We do not know how much this changed the continents.
- 7:16, The Lord shut the door and sealed it.

- 7:20, The Flood was 15 cubits deeper than the highest mountain.
- 7:21 – 22, Oddly, when dinosaur bones are found, they are in large groups, all having died about the same time. If the dinosaurs died off one or a few at a time, they would be much more scattered. Instead, it appears that the dinosaurs in each region all went to a local high ground to avoid the flood, and all drowned in a small area as the water trapped them and then continued to rise.

Genesis 8

- 8:1 – 5, After 150 days, as the waters receded, the Ark became lodged on the top of Mount Ararat, between Turkey and Armenia. Note the miracle. Causing the Flood required that God “break up the deep” to produce enough water to cover everything. Then, another miracle was required for it to drain, since the whole earth was covered. There was no low spot for drainage. So, God disposed of enough water for dry land to reappear.
- 8:6 – 12, As land became visible, Noah sent out a raven, but it did not come back. When he sent out a dove, the dove returned when it did not find any suitable place to land. After a week, Noah sent about the dove again, but this time it came back with an olive sprig in its beak, indicating to Noah that vegetation was re-emerging. A dove with an olive twig in its beak has become the symbol of peace since early Christian times. Noah sent out the dove a third time. It did not return.
- 8:13, Forty-five days short of a year after Noah’s family got on the ark, Noah removed the covering on the ark and saw dry ground.
- 8:14, Ten days more than a year after Noah’s family got on the ark, “the earth was dried.”
- 8:15 – 19, God gave the order to disembark.
- 8:20 – 22, Noah offered sacrifices of all the clean animals. Remember, he brought seven of each clean animal, so enough remained to allow them to reproduce. God liked the sacrifice, and determined to rescind the curse on the ground from Genesis 3:17 – 19. God did not expect everything to go smoothly, remarking that people go astray early in life (a “youth” was someone between the ages of 13 and 30). God promised never again to destroy all the living creatures (except those on the ark). Further, He promised that the seasons and solar events would continue uninterrupted until the end.

Chapter 9

- 9:1 – 7, God ordered Noah and his family to reproduce. Note that Noah’s sons had not children before the Flood, and had not had any during the year on the Ark. Also, God told them of a few changes. (1) Animals would be afraid of them. Apparently, before the Flood, they were not afraid. This is not because people did not kill animals. They sacrificed animals. (2) Humans would be omnivores, eating both plants and animals. (3) However, when eating animals, they were to drain the blood first. (4) Capital punishment for murder was instituted. Remember that Cain was not killed for murdering Abel.
- 9:8 – 17, God repeated some of His previous statements, this time describing them as a contract: (1) The contract was for Noah and all future descendants, which would encompass all humans since all are descendants of Noah, (2) God promised never to use a flood again to kill off everything, (3) The sign of that promise would be the rainbow.
- 9:20 – 27, Noah and family began to farm so they could have cultivated food rather than having to forage. One of the crops came from a vineyard. Of course, grapes do not keep well, so most of the crop was converted to wine. Noah got drunk and, in his drunken state,

became uncovered and exposed himself to those who might look into his tent. Ham saw this and told his brothers rather than keeping it private and covering his father before anyone else could see. Shem and Japheth had more sense and propriety. Then walked backwards into Noah's tent holding a blanket and covered their father. As a result, after Noah sobered up, he pronounced a curse on Ham, specifically on one of his descendants, Canaan (10:6), that they would be servants to the other two-thirds of humanity. So, several grandchildren of Noah had been born by this time including Canaan. However, the descendants of Shem and Japheth would get along well, to the point of being able to live together.

Chapter 10

- The nations and cities given in this genealogy did not exist until after the dispersion of the people from Babel (11:7 – 9). Many of the cities have been identified and located, but many have not. Moses wrote this long after Babel and after these places were well established. In that time, the original audience would have heard of all these places. A person could be said to build a city because they were still living for centuries. At the time of Babel, they were still living over 200 years. Before Babel, they were declining from the pre-Flood ages of 8 or 9 centuries down to 4 centuries (11:10 – 26).
- Some of the identified places are Gomer (Wales and Brittany), Magog (Scythians, near Armenia), Madai (Media, between Persia and Assyria), Javan (Greece), Tibareni and Moschi (Turkey), Tiras (Thrace, near Greece), Ashkenaz (Germany), Riphath (Celts), Togarmah (Armenia), Elishah (Thessalonians), Tarshish (Spain), Lydia (western Turkey), Kittim, (Cyprus), Dardani (islands in the Aegean Sea), Cush (Ethiopia), Mizraim (Egypt), Put (Libya), Seba (northern Ethiopia), Havilah (Ethiopia), Raamah (Oman), Sabteah (Ethiopia), Sheba and Dedan (Arabia)

Chapter 11

- 11:2, Shinar is Mesopotamia, the Fertile Crescent, modern southern Iraq. Since they came from the east, Mt. Ararat must be to the east of Iraq, not in the Ararat Mountains in Lebanon.
- 11:3, Mesopotamia had few trees, so the primary building material was brick. Today, that region is a desert due to poor agricultural practices after the Muslim invasion in the 600's AD. For thousands of years before that, the region was the world's greatest producer of grains, using irrigation from the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Asphalt is a petroleum product, naturally available in several places in the Fertile Crescent. This indicates subsurface crude oil, which began to be pumped out only at the beginning of the 20th century.
- 11:4, the people of that time stayed together because they understood how much more productive they could be. However, this did not accomplish God's request that they be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (8:15 – 17). The description of "a tower whose top is in the heavens" does not mean that they thought they could reach God. "Heavens" had three meanings: where birds fly, where the stars are, and where God is. They just wanted to build a very high tower into the sky. The point was that the tower represented their self-sufficiency, rather than depending on God.
- 11:6 – 7, God confused their languages so that they would split up and perhaps re-learn how to depend on God rather than on themselves.

- Those who believe in evolution (rather than a 7-day creation) teach that languages developed from crude beginnings and became more complex over time. However, no evidence exists of any language becoming more complex over time. Instead, every language gets simpler as the centuries pass. So, the incident at Babel is the best explanation. God miraculously caused various clans to suddenly have a fully developed language of their own, not similar to the other groups. So, they could not understand one another. Because they had become so self-reliant, they did not decide to learn the languages of the others, but to split up, another illustration of self-centeredness.
- 11:10 – 26, The ages of the ancestors of Abraham, both when they had children and when they died, are listed. We can assemble the ages of all the people in the genealogy and determine the dates of Creation and the Flood. However, because people rarely die on their birthdays, the ages are rounded to whole years, leaving small fractions unaccounted. So, we can determine the dates of Creation and the Flood only within about 15 years, plus or minus. In the following table, A.C. means After Creation.

	Birth year	Age when	Father year	Age at	Death year	One-sided Tolerance		Birth Year
Name	(A.C.)	father	(A.C.)	death	(A.C.)	(+ or -)		BC
Adam	0	130	130	930	930	0.5	Gen 5:3-5	4113
Seth	130	105	235	912	1042	1.0	Gen 5:6-8	3983
Enosh	235	90	325	905	1140	1.5	Gen 5:9-11	3878
Kenan	325	70	395	910	1235	2.0	Gen 5:12-14	3788
Mahalalel	395	65	460	895	1290	2.5	Gen 5:15-17	3718
Jared	460	162	622	962	1422	3.0	Gen 5:18-20	3653
Enoch	622	65	687	365	987	3.5	Gen 5:21-24	3491
Methuselah	687	187	874	969	1656	4.0	Gen 5:25-27	3426
Lamech	874	182	1056	777	1651	4.5	Gen 5:28-31	3239
Noah	1056	500	1556	950		5.0	Gen 5:32, 9:29	3057
Flood in Noah's 600th year					1656	5.5		2457
Assuming that Shem was Noah's first child...ages are not given for the others.								
Shem became a father 2 (3?) years after the flood, so the total must be corrected.							Gen 8:13, 11:10	
Shem	1556	100	1656	600	2156	5.5	Gen 11:10-11	2557
Arpachshad	1656	35	1691	438	2094	6.0	Gen 11:12-13	2457
Shelah	1691	30	1721	433	2124	6.5	Gen 11:14-15	2422
Eber	1721	34	1755	464	2185	7.0	Gen 11:16-17	2392
Peleg	1755	30	1785	239	1994	7.5	Gen 11:18-19	2358
Reu	1785	32	1817	239	2024	8.0	Gen 11:20-21	2328
Serug	1817	30	1847	230	2047	8.5	Gen 11:22-23	2296
Nahor	1847	29	1876	148	1995	9.0	Gen 11:24-25	2266
Terah	1876	70	1946	205	2081	9.5	Gen 11:26-32	2237
Abram	1946	100	2046	175	2121	10.0	Gen 21:5 25:7	2167
Abram was 75 when he left for Canaan; Terah died in Haran					2021	10.5	Gen 12:4, 11:32	
Isaac	2046	60	2106	180	2226	11.0	Gen 25:26, 35:28	2067
Jacob	2106			147	2253	11.5	Gen 47:28	2007
Jacob lived 17 years in Egypt					2236	12.0	Gen 47:28	
Exodus was 430 years after arrival					2666	12.5	Ex 12:40-41	

The temple was dedicated 480 years after the Exodus	3146	13.0	1Kg 6:1	
The best date for the Exodus is 1447 BC				

- 11:26 – 32, This history of Abraham and Lot before arriving in the Promised Land sets the stage for the promises made to Abraham and the origins of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites. This would be important to the Israelites (Moses' audience) because they were all descendants of Abraham and Sarah.

Chapter 12

- 12:1 – 3, Abraham was summoned by God to leave the land of his ancestors and move to an unnamed location which God would show him when he got there. Further, God promised Abram, whose name meant "exalted father" (whose name is later changed to Abraham, "father of many nations"). The line in verse 3, "All the tribes of the earth shall bless themselves by you," is the first promise concerning the Messiah originating from him. Stephen (Acts 7:2 – 3) cited this passage at the beginning of his speech that resulted in his death. Hebrews 11:8 references this passage as an illustration of Abraham's great faith. Peter (Acts 3:25) cited this passage in his address to the people who gathered after he healed a lame man. Paul (Galatians 3:8) cited this passage to emphasize that the Messiah was destined to rescue all faithful people, Jew and Gentile.
- 12:4 – 9, Details of Abraham's travel to the Promised Land are given. He was 75 at that time. Lot, his nephew went also, presumably with his wife and maybe his infant daughters (his daughters were adults in chapters 18 – 19, about 24 years later). Haran, the starting point, is in northern Syria (see 11:29 – 32). But Abraham grew up in Ur, which has been excavated, revealing its wealth and artistry and civil engineering, including a sewer system. Abraham and Lot owned slaves, who will become important later in the story of Abraham. At the time of writing (under Moses, 500 years later), the named locations were familiar to the initial audience. The locations of some of them have been lost to history. God informed Abraham that his descendants would inherit this land. Later in the story God will tell Abraham why he did not receive them immediately, "The iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full." God could not dispossess the Canaanites yet because they were not all irretrievably sinful.
- 12:10 – 20, Abraham was forced to go to Egypt to find food. Famines were common because of the difficulty of transportation. When drought ruined a crop, it was easier for the people to go to the available food than for the food to be transported to them. Even at her advanced age, Sarai was considered very beautiful. So, Abraham asked her to pose as his sister so he would not be murdered by someone wanting to possess Sarai. The Pharaoh (a title, not a name), thinking Sarai to be single, promptly moved her into his harem. God caused plagues on Egypt as a result. The Pharaoh figured out that the plagues had to do with Sarai, but we are not told how he came to that conclusion. The Pharaoh confronted Abram about the deception. Abram told him the truth. So, the Pharaoh gave Sarai back to Abram and politely sent him out of the country.

Chapter 13

- 13:3, The location was first mentioned in 12:8.
- 13:6 – 7, The herds and flocks need to be reasonable distance from the location of the owner. In Jacob's day, his sons were tending flocks near Shechem while Jacob's tent was

near Hebron (37:1, 12), a distance of about 45 miles (70 km). Jacob was in the same situation as Abraham, with no family nearby to come to his aid. So, when Abraham and Lot camped in the same place, the distance to the farthest grazing area would increase by a factor of 1.4, assuming that every direction had equally good grazing land. This caused disputes between the servants of the two men as to who would get the closer pastures.

- 13:8 – 12, Abraham solved the grazing problem by asking Lot to move. The choice of which pastures would be his was given by Abraham to Lot. Lot chose the region east and south of the Dead Sea. In that time, that region was prime grazing land. Today, it is desert due to the climate change caused by the Roman destruction of Israel in 67 – 70 AD. Zoar was spared from destruction because Lot was too old to escape to the hills when the cities of the plain (Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Zoar) were scheduled for destruction. As a result, Zoar was spared (19:20 – 22).
- 13:14 – 18, Abraham was promised that his descendants would inherit the land around where Abraham was camped. The exact limits were not specified until 15:18.

Chapter 14

- 14:1 – 12, Four kings from the northeast of Canaan conquered the five cities of the plain. After 12 years of domination, the five cities of the plain decided to stop sending tribute. A year after the tribute did not arrive, the four kings came back to re-assert their authority and re-conquered the five cities of the plain. As customary, the victors looted the defeated cities and took many as slaves. This included Lot who was living in Sodom.
- 14:13 – 16, Abraham was informed of Lot's capture, so he armed 318 of his servants who had been trained for war. Three commanders among nearby Amorites joined him. Certainly Abraham had more servants than this, since his herds and flocks still needed to be tended. Abraham and his servants caught up with the four kings (travelling slowly due to the booty and the slaves) north of Damascus, a distance of about 150 miles (240 km). Abraham's men prevailed and brought back the booty and the people.
- 14:17 – 20, Melchizedek was king of Salem (Salem of the Jebusites. Over time, the words were pushed together and became Jerusalem). He was also the High Priest of that city. Further, Abraham considered Melchizedek to be an appropriate priest of the God Most High, since he accepted his blessing and gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils of war. The encounter is recorded again in Hebrews 7:1 – 10 in which Melchizedek is compared to Jesus in that Melchizedek was not an Israelite (obviously, since there were no Israelites yet) yet was a high priest of the Most High God. Therefore, one did not need to be from the tribe of Levi to be a legitimate priest (although one had to be of Levi to be a priest in Israel under the Law). Therefore, the writer of Hebrews concludes, the Messiah could be a true High Priest, just not under the Law of Moses. Therefore, a new covenant was required under which the Messiah would be High Priest.
- 14:21 – 24, The king of Sodom tried to reward Abraham for rescuing his people by giving Abraham all the spoils of war (minus the tithe to Melchizedek). Abraham declined except for what had been eaten by his men and the normal portion for the three commanders whom Abraham had recruited from among the Amorites in the region. So, the king of Sodom probably got back only about 25% of the total taken, but that was better than nothing, plus he got back all his citizens.

Chapter 15

- 15:1 – 2, In those days, if the master (slave owner) died childless, the estate passed to the chief servant, in this case, Eliezer of Damascus.
- 15:2 – 5, Abraham complained about being childless despite the promises in 12:2 and 12:7. God gave more detail and enlarged the promises, that Abraham would have a physical descendant, and that his future descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, as cited in Hebrews 11:12. Romans 4:18 also quotes a bit of this.
- 15:6, This short saying is repeated several times in the New Testament as the foundation of the relationship between humans and God: faith. See Romans 4:3, 4:9, 4:22, Galatians 3:6, and James 2:23.
- 15:7 – 21, Abraham wanted some sort of evidence that these promises were real. Note that God did not get upset with him or say that his faith was weak. Instead, God made more specific promises, gave some reasons why it was working out the way it was, and gave several specific details. God told Abraham to bring certain animals for sacrifice, and told him how to arrange the carcasses. Then, nothing happened. Abraham had to wait until after nightfall. When Abraham was asleep, God told him that his descendants would have to move to another country and be afflicted for four centuries before being able to return to the promised land. Stephen referenced this passage in Acts 7:6. However, Abraham was promised that he himself would not need to move, that he would live in that land and die peacefully at a good old age. God's reason for the delay in giving the land was that those who occupied it at that time were not sufficiently bad (remember Melchizedek), so God could not justly dispossess them yet. But, after those four centuries, they would be sufficiently bad, so Abraham's descendants would be granted the land then. Specific borders were given: from the Euphrates River to the Brook of Egypt (which is about half way across the Sinai Peninsula). The names of the tribes to be dispossessed were given.

Chapter 16

- 16:1 – 3, In those times, if a couple were childless, this practice of having a child with the servant was a common alternative. The child was to be the property of the childless wife and would inherit as the child of the master. The servant also had rights and could not be sold off or treated badly.
- 16:4 – 6, Sarah, however, later did not like the arrangement because Hagar, the slave, showed no respect to Sarah and was enjoying her status as mother of the heir a little too much. Abraham, perhaps in a show of weakness, let Sarah do what she wanted. Hagar became so distressed that she ran away.
- 16:7 – 16, God was not content to let Hagar depart, so sent an angel to convince her to go back to Abraham's encampment, and there to submit to Sarah. Further, God promised Hagar that her son (Ishmael) would be the start of a great nation. Ishmael is the father of all Arabs. However, God predicted that Ishmael would be a wild and confrontational man, implying that this would be the nature of his descendants, too. Historically, that is how it turned out. And, 2600 years later, Islam originated from among the Arabs. During all of its history, the Arabs have been a wild and confrontational group. Abraham was 86 when Ishmael was born.

Chapter 17

- 17:1, Thirteen years elapsed between the last verse of chapter 16 and the beginning of chapter 17. God identified Himself as El Shaddai, the God of All Power. God decided to

change this identification with power in Exodus 6:3, after which He was to be known as I Am, a change from power to relationship.

- 17:1 – 8, God reviewed His promises to Abram (Exalted Father) and renamed him Abraham (Father of a Multitude). The “father of many nations” promise is cited by Paul in Romans 4:17. The Promised Land promise was repeated. The covenant of being a God to the descendants of Abraham forever was to last forever. The Jewish people today are not the inheritors of this promise, but the church (Galatians 3:7 – 14, Romans 4:13 – 18, 11:17 – 27, et al).
- 17:9 – 14, Abraham was given the covenant of circumcision to identify those who were his physical descendants. Baby boys were to be circumcised the eighth day. Foreigners who were slaves among the descendants of Abraham were to be circumcised, so many non-Israelites were circumcised. Since all Arabs are descendants of Ishmael, they are circumcised to this day. However, Gentile Christians did not need to be circumcised (Acts 15:24 – 29, Galatians 2:3, 5:2 – 6, et al).
- 17:15, Sarai was renamed Sarah.
- 17:16 – 22, God revealed to Abraham that the promise of descendants would be with Sarah, at which Abraham laughed due to their advanced age. God also promised that Ishmael, while not to be the one through whom the Messiah would come, would produce a dozen sons and a great nation (the Arabs of today). God promised that Sarah would deliver a son one year from then.
- 17:23 – 27, On the very next day, Abraham circumcised all the males of his camp, which would be hundreds of men (remember the 318 servants Abraham used to recaptured Lot and family and the goods from Sodom).

Chapter 18

- 18:1 – 8, Abraham seems to understand that these were divine messengers (verse 3), although he seeks to satisfy physical needs. The amount of flour he specified to Sarah (v 6) would make more than 12 loaves. A whole calf would yield enough meat for a hundred people. Preparation time would be several hours. Hebrews 13:2 reminds the reader of scenes like this one (also Lot in 19:2), that hospitality can have unintended positive outcomes. That statement implies that Abraham was not aware, unless the author of Hebrews intended Lot as his example.
- 18:9 – 15, This scene makes it plain that the guests are divine, predicting the superhuman. God repeated the promise of 17:21, that Sarah would have a son soon (after a normal time of pregnancy). Sarah had a difficult time accepting that she, well past menopause, would not only have intercourse with Abraham, but also deliver a son. When reproached for her disbelief, Sarah was frightened and denied laughing at the prospect.
- 18:16 – 19, In this short paragraph is a record of what God was thinking as the tree visitors prepared to depart from Abraham’s camp. Verse 18 says, “God said,” but leaves open to question whether He spoke it to the two angels, or to Abraham. If He spoke it only to the two angels, then this paragraph was revealed to Moses more than four centuries later. God decided to tell Abraham about His plan for the five cities of the plain (including Sodom and Gomorrah).
- 18:20 – 33, When God reveals His intention to destroy those cities because of their grave sin, Abraham tried to find a way to convince God not to do so. He asked if God would go ahead with His plan if 50 righteous men could be found in Sodom. God agreed to relent if

that were the case. Then Abraham bargained for 45, then 40, then 30, then 20, then 10. God agreed to the terms each time. Perhaps Abraham was concerned that Lot might be killed in the destruction. Perhaps God already knew that the angels would preserve Lot, but that there were no others. The text does not say. God implied that He did not already know (verse 21), but needed to investigate to see if the complaints were true.

Chapter 19

- 19:1 – 3, The custom of the time was that the older men would sit in the main gate of the city to be available to settle disputes and to offer wise counsel. The gate was not just a door, but rather a stone tunnel (the city wall was composed of houses, not just a stockade fence). The stone kept the tunnel cool, and any breeze would funnel through it. Stone benches generally were built into a gate tunnel. The custom of the time was for the inhabitants of a city to invite strangers to stay the night, to feed them and send them on their way re-supplied. It appears that Lot was one of few, or perhaps the only one, to maintain this expensive custom. So, the strangers (the angels) went home with Lot.
- 19:4 – 11, The depravity of Sodom had reached the point that the men of the city came to Lot's house with the demand that he turn over his guests to them so that they could have forced homosexual relations with them. Lot refused. Amazing to us, he offered his two virgin daughters to the mob as a substitute. Perhaps Lot knew that they were interested only in homosexual rape, so his daughters would not be harmed. But if that were the case, Lot must have known that the mob would not be satisfied with the offer. The mob became angry at the refusal (and perhaps the proposed substitution), and tried to attack Lot. The angels grabbed Lot and pulled him back into the house, then blinded the crowd so they could not persist.
- 19:12 – 14, The angels revealed their intentions to Lot and asked that he gather his family so they could all escape the impending destruction. Lot is said to have sons-in-law, although his daughters were virgins. So, using our terminology, Lot's two daughters were engaged and their fiancés did not come to Lot's house because they thought it was a joke.
- 19:15 – 17, In the morning, the angels told Lot to get out of the city and escape to the mountains so as not to be caught in the destruction. Apparently, Lot was not moving fast enough (delaying perhaps to pack, or thinking that it was not really true), so the angels took the four family members by the hand and forced them to leave the city with the final instructions of not looking back, and escaping to the mountains.
- 19:18 – 22, Lot objected to the instruction of escaping to the mountains. Perhaps he felt too old, or thought that the trip was too dangerous. So, he bargained with the angel to be able to escape to Zoar, one of the five cities slated for destruction (along with Admah and Zeboim). The angel relented, let Lot escape to Zoar, and agreed to spare that city. The four cities of the plain (omitting Zoar) are listed in 10:19. Hosea 11:8 recalled this event, but used Admah and Zeboim as the examples, rather than Sodom and Gomorrah. The name, Zoar, means "little" or "insignificant." So, it must have been very small. Because it was spared, it became the only town on that plain, so existed for centuries after this and became much larger.
- 19:23 – 29, After Lot and daughters reached Zoar, the destruction began. Lot's wife, contrary to the instructions in 19:17, looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. I think that the "looking back" was more than just a glance, but was accompanied by a

longing to return, as though she were a part of that society. The smoke rising from the destruction caught Abraham's attention at a distance of about 65 km.

- 19:30, Lot did not feel safe in Zoar, perhaps because of the evil society that had been slated for destruction, or perhaps because the citizens of Zoar blamed Lot for the destruction of the other four cities, or perhaps just because they were strangers to Zoar and might be abused as the mob wanted to do with the angels in Lot's house. So, he did what the angels had asked originally and moved to the mountains.
- 19:31 – 38, Lot's daughters assumed that no one would want to marry them after people began to blame Lot for the destruction (although they surely could have found husbands in the camp of Abraham or back in Syria among their own people as Abraham would do for Isaac (chapter 24). So, the girls each got their father drunk and had sex with him. Each of them bore sons: Moab and Ammon. These two became the patriarchs of tribes by those names that were still in the area when the Israelites came to take the promised land, and continued as countries until the time of the Babylonian invasion 1400 years later. Moab occupied the territory to the east of the southern half of the Dead Sea, up to the Arnon River which empties into the east side of the Dead Sea. Ammon occupied the territory from the Arnon to the north. But, they lost their land to the Amorites during the time when the Israelites were in Egypt and had been pushed back into the fringes of the Arabian desert. However, both regions were very fertile, allowing both livestock herding and row crops. Today, both regions are desert.

Chapter 20

- Interaction between Abraham and the king of Gerar, Abimelech.
- 20:1, Abraham moved about 35 miles southwest. The reason is not given, but likely it was to move his considerable livestock to new pastures.
- 20:2, as Abraham explained in v12, Abraham and Sarah were half-siblings. Such close intermarriage was not illegal then. Under the Law of Moses, 500 years later, it was illegal (Leviticus 18:9). Abraham was afraid that someone would kill him for the purpose of taking his wife (v11).
- 20:3 – 7, apparently Abimelech was a worshipper of the one true God, also. Abraham had assumed that the people of Gerar were not (v11). In that day, when a woman was added to a harem, generally she was not allowed to have relations with her new husband for a long enough time to ensure that she was not already pregnant. This harem practice avoided introducing a different bloodline into the royal family which, when the child was grown, could be used to start a rebellion. Apparently (v6), God made sure that this custom was followed until He could get it all straightened out. Significant time must have passed if "closing up the wombs" (20:17) would be noticeable.
- 20:8 – 10, Abimelech confronted Abraham concerning the deception (and the fact that Abraham seemed willing to let another man sleep with his wife for the purpose of ensuring his own safety). Abimelech clearly is innocent of any wrongdoing, and Abraham's choices are seriously questionable. Further, the people of Gerar were similarly aghast.
- 20:11 – 13, Abraham had been using this ruse for some time. In 12:10 – 20, he used the same story with the Pharaoh of Egypt.
- 20:14 – 16, Abimelech wanted to be certain that no one could accuse him of impropriety, so he made a public display of presenting Abraham with many gifts at the same time as he returned Sarah, in value about 1000 shekels. This illustrated that the gifts were not a bride

price, since he was returning Sarah at the same time. Further, this exonerated Sarah from any involvement. Had anything happened, Abimelech would not have made a public event of the gifts.

- 20:17 – 18, Abraham, the one who cased the mess, prayed for Abimelech, the innocent party. Abimelech put up with that situation because God had told him to do so (v7). God removed the womb restraint He had set in place as a precaution.

Chapter 21

- 21:1 – 7, Isaac was born as promised (18:9 – 15). Isaac was circumcised as directed (17:9 – 14). The assumption is made that he was named Isaac (laughter) because Sarah had laughed at the prospect of having sexual pleasure again and having a child in her old age.
- 21:8 – 21, Sarah grew jealous of Hagar and her 13-year-old son Ishmael, so appealed to Abraham to send them away, ostensibly so there would be no controversy later about inheritance. Abraham was not pleased with the idea (v11) of expelling his son. But, God told Abraham that he should do as his wife asked (v12). So, Abraham supplied Hagar and Ishmael with a minimal amount of provisions and sent them away. They headed south, toward Egypt, presumably because Hagar was Egyptian. But, they ran out of water and were preparing to die. The distance of a bowshot has been estimated by many, ranging from 75 to 800 meters. But, God told Hagar where to find water, which preserved them. God had promised Hagar that Ishmael would become a great nation (17:20), so He was keeping His promise. Because Hagar took an Egyptian to be Ishmael's wife, all Arabs (Ishmael's descendants) are 25% Hebrew and 75% Egyptian. Over the centuries, surely some other ethnicities were mixed in, but this is the dominant, foundational ratio.
- 21:22 – 34, Abimelech (from chapter 20) wanted to make a treaty with Abraham rather than eventually having to fight him. Abraham had a significant number of trained servants who had defeated major forces before (14:13 – 16). Also, God had told Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet (20:7), so likely did not want to be found fighting against God in the future. Shortly after that agreement, Abraham complained to Abimelech that a well that Abraham's men had dug had been usurped by Abimelech's men (v 25). Abimelech quickly disavowed any knowledge of the action and set about to make peace. Abraham gave Abimelech livestock to "buy" his own well (v27). But, Abraham wanted to make it known that the well truly had been dug by his men, so reserved an additional seven ewe lambs. By receiving the lambs, Abimelech agreed to Abraham's claim that the well had been Abraham's all along. That is how Beersheba got its name (Well of the Oath, or Well of the Seven. The Hebrew translation is uncertain.)

Chapter 22

- 22:1 – 14, This is the scene of Abraham sacrificing Isaac. Muhammed believed that this scene was in error and "corrected" it to Abraham sacrificing Ishmael. Abraham was encamped in the southern part of the promised land, near Beersheba at this time (21:33 – 34). In verse 1, we learn that God was testing Abraham, whether Abraham really believed God's promises. Tradition says that the location God chose for the sacrifice was the place that, a thousand years later, the first Temple was built. This may or may not be true, since walls of Salem, the city of Melchizedek, were only 250 meters away, probably in plain view. Note that the Temple was built on Mount Moriah, whereas verse 2 says "the land of Moriah." Abraham was told at the outset that he was to sacrifice Isaac, yet he rose the next

morning and started out on his journey without stalling or questioning. Taking along two other young men probably was for security. In verse 5, note Abraham's confidence in saying to the two young men that "We will come back to you," not "I will come back to you." In verse 7, Isaac noticed that they had not brought an animal to sacrifice. In verse 8, Abraham replied that God would provide. In verse 9, Isaac willingly allowed Abraham to tie him and place him on the altar, so Isaac, too, was demonstrating great faith. When it was obvious to God that Abraham was planning to complete the sacrifice by killing Isaac, he was instructed through an Angel to stop (22:12). Interestingly, God said, "Now I know that you fear God." If God knew the future, Abraham's action did not teach God anything. Therefore, God did not know what Abraham was going to do in this test situation. In 22:13, God provided a ram as a substitute for Isaac. Hebrews 11:17 – 19 adds an additional detail. Abraham understood the promise that Isaac would be the descendant through which the Messiah would come, so he concluded that, even if he killed Isaac, God could raise him up again so that the promise would come true.

- 22:15 – 19, As a result of passing this test, God repeated the promises made in 12:1 – 3, 15:5 – 6, and 15:13 – 21 and expanded on them.
- 22:20 – 24, Abraham was told about his relatives who had remained in the northern end of Mesopotamia, about the children and grandchildren. This is the first mention of Rebekah, Abraham's great-niece, who would later become Isaac's wife. Marrying close relatives was common in those days. Remember that Sarah was Abraham's half-sister.

Chapter 23

- 23:1 – 20, This is the story of the death of Sarah. Certainly several servants had died in the previous 60 or more years since Abraham had come to Canaan, but this is the first time he felt he needed a tomb. The form of negotiation recorded in this chapter was common in those times. The meeting between buyer and seller was conducted in the city gate where plenty of city elders would be present, so that the transaction could be witnessed. A cave was known to Abraham that would suit his needs, so he asked for it as a gift (23:4). The locals offered their existing tombs to Abraham (23:6), but Abraham wanted his own, so he could visit the site any time, and that the locals would not be observing Sarah decompose as they used other spaces in the same tomb (23:8 – 9). As was the custom of the time, the owner of the cave agreed to give it, but mentioned its value so that Abraham would know how much he expected to receive (23:15). The deal was finalized (23:17 – 18). This cave was near Mamre, which was later re-named Hebron. Tradition has identified the location of this tomb near modern Hebron which is reputed to contain the remains of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their wives.

Chapter 24

- 24:1 – 9, After Sarah's death, Abraham decided to obtain a wife for Isaac. As was the custom of the time, marriages within the clan were customary, so Abraham sent his chief servant to the city of Abraham's brother, Nahor. The servant that Abraham chose for the task was his chief servant, who would have become the inheritor if Abraham died without an heir. However, this might have been contested by Ishmael, who was the biological son of Abraham. Abraham specified that he did not want Isaac to marry any of the Canaanite women. While certainly several would have been god-fearing (like Melchizedek and many in the city of Salem), Abraham knew that, 400 years later, his descendants would be

dispossessing and probably slaughtering the Canaanites. To be connected to them by marriage certainly would cause political problems. Further, Abraham did not want Isaac to travel to the city of Nahor to avoid the possibility that Isaac would want to stay there among his people (and his wife's close relatives) and lose touch with the Promised Land (24:3 – 6). Abraham assured his servant that God would direct the operation, but, just to make the servant feel better, Abraham told him that, if things went badly, he was released from the oath (24:7 – 8). The common means of taking an oath in those days was to grasp the testicles of the one receiving the promise (in this case, Abraham) while making the promise (24:2, 9).

- 24:10 – 21, The servant departed for the city of Nahor with ample provisions (10 loaded camels). The servant asked God to help him find the right girl and proposed that he would know the girl if she responded in a certain way. The Scriptures do not record whether God just went along with the servant's proposal, or if God told the servant how it would happen. Nevertheless, one girl who came out to fill her water jug at the well, Rebekah, performed just as the servant had proposed. But, even after that, the servant was not entirely convinced (24:21) because, as revealed in the next paragraph, the servant did not yet know of what clan Rebekah was.
- 24:22 – 28, The servant rewarded Rebekah handsomely for her kindness at the well and inquired as to her family. Upon discovering that Rebekah was of exactly the right clan, he worshipped and thanked God (24:27).
- 24:29 – 49, The servant followed the girl back to her brother's house and introductions were made. The servant insisted on telling the whole story to those of the brother's household. The servant told the story in such a way to illustrate the hand of God in the meeting. Also, he let them know that his master was very rich.
- 24:50 – 60, Having found success, the servant rewarded both Rebekah and Laban with great riches, then asked for permission to depart with Rebekah. To depart without the blessing of the head of the household would have been exceedingly rude. Laban wanted them to tarry at least ten days, so they could have a party and a proper send-off. But the servant wanted to leave immediately. So, they asked Rebekah. She wanted to leave as soon as possible, so they did, taking servants (see also verse 61) belonging to Rebekah with them.
- 24:61 – 67, Isaac, who was out meditating outside the camp, saw the caravan with Rebekah approaching. Rebekah asked who the man was, and, upon learning that it was her future husband, covered herself as would be appropriate in that culture. Apparently, they were married almost immediately and set up housekeeping in the tents formerly occupied by the deceased Sarah. Fortunately, Isaac loved Rebekah.

Chapter 25

- 25:1 – 6, Abraham re-married after the death of Sarah, to Keturah. An interesting offspring was Midian, who became the ancestor to Jethro, Moses' father-in-law (Exodus 3:1). Isaac inherited all of Abraham's estate, but he did give gifts (likely very sizeable gifts) to the children of Keturah. Further, Abraham sent the children of Keturah away to the east (mostly Arabia), probably to avoid conflict with Isaac, either for grazing space or for inheritance.
- 25:7 – 12, Abraham died at the age of 175. Interestingly, Ishmael was informed of Abraham's death and joined Isaac in placing Abraham in his tomb with Sarah.

- 25:12 – 18, The genealogy of Ishmael was recorded. He is the ancestor of all Arabs and died at the age of 137.
- 25:19 – 26, Isaac married Rebekah at age 40, and was barren twenty years (25:26). Isaac pleaded with the Lord for children and it happened: Jacob and Esau. Because the twins were so active in her womb, Rebekah asked God why. God replied that they were struggling against one another as they would do all their lives. Further, contrary to custom, the prediction was made by God that the older would serve the younger. The name, Esau, means hairy. Jacob means deceiver or supplanter.
- 25:27 – 34, Esau was a hunter; Jacob stayed around the tents. Isaac liked the fresh game brought in by Esau, so favored him. Rebekah preferred the mild-mannered Jacob. Jacob had cooked a stew. Esau came in hungry from hunting and asked for some. Jacob made a bargain that only someone who was flippant about tradition would make: sell your birthright for a bowl of stew. The point was that Esau did not take seriously his responsibility as the older son and did not value his word, but used it without thinking. Apparently, even a facetious comment had importance. Esau received the nickname, Red (Edom), because the stew was red. The event is mentioned in Hebrews 12:16 with the admonition not to be flippant like Esau.

Chapter 26

- 26:1 – 5, After the death of Abraham (25:7 – 11), another famine happened in Canaan, much like the famine which had driven Abraham to Egypt (12:10 – 13:1). God told Isaac specifically not to go to Egypt, but to stay in the Promised Land, of which Philistia was a part. God repeated the promise that He had previously given to Abraham (12:1 – 3, 15:5, 22:17 – 18). However, to inherit this promise to Abraham, Isaac was required to follow God's directions. Since the Law of Moses was still 500 years in the future, the nature of the commandments, statutes and laws of God (26:5) are unknown.
- 26:6 – 11, Isaac employed almost the same deception that Abraham had used on the Pharaoh (12:10 – 31:1), except Isaac did not have the excuse that Abraham had; Sarah was Abraham's half-sister. Rebekah was a first cousin once removed to Isaac, so calling her his sister was a complete lie. Privacy was in short supply in those days, so Isaac was seen caressing Rebekah, revealing that they were not siblings but spouses. Abimelech confronted Isaac about the lie. Further, Abimelech demonstrated that he had a good moral code because his fear was that, had anyone pursued Rebekah and taken her into his harem, the city would be held accountable by God (26:10). Abimelech made an edict to ensure the safety of Isaac and Rebekah, which was a bit odd since it was Isaac who was at fault. Perhaps Abimelech had known more about Abraham and his relationship with God than is recorded.
- 26:12 – 22, Due to the famine (26:1), Isaac had caused trouble for himself and Abimelech by lying. He should have trusted God. In verse 12, Isaac plants crops (although he is primarily a keeper of herds and flocks, not a row-crop farmer) and reaps tremendously (100-fold). However, this prosperity caused further division with the Philistines because they were jealous of Isaac's wealth. Because of their jealousy, they started working against Isaac, stopping up the wells where he had been watering his herds and flocks, even though the wells had been dug by Abraham. At the request of Abimelech, Isaac move farther from the cities of the Philistines. To have enough water, he re-dug the wells that Abraham had dug, but that had been filled in by the Philistines out of jealousy. Then, the Philistines

began to claim that the wells dug by Isaac had actually been dug by themselves. Isaac just kept moving to new areas and digging new wells. Finally, Isaac was far enough away from the Philistines that they no longer tried to cause trouble for him.

- 26:23 – 25, God appears to Isaac again and repeated the promise to Abraham (26:3), that God would multiply the descendants of Abraham.
- 26:26 – 33, Abimelech and his chief general, Phichol, come to make a treaty with Isaac. They lie about not causing Isaac any harm, but Isaac does not react. Isaac and Abimelech agree not to attack one another, although Isaac has been only retreating for some time.
- 26:34 – 35, Esau, at the age of 40, married two Hittite women. This grieved Isaac and Rebekah because they understood that they should not make marriage alliances with the surrounding people because, when God decided that the time was right, the descendants of Abraham would dispossess those peoples and take the Promised Land (which happened under Joshua, about 500 years later).

Chapter 27

- 27:1 – 46, Keep in mind 25:29 – 34 in which Esau flippantly sold his birthright for a serving of stew. Also remember Hebrews 11:20 which says that Isaac was acting by faith when he blessed Jacob and Esau as he does in this chapter, hinting that Isaac was not totally deceived, but rather went along with the deception being played out by Jacob and Rebekah because that was what Isaac knew should happen anyway. Jacob was interested in the promises to Abraham, whereas Esau married two Hittite women in contravention of Abraham's wishes of staying separate from the tribes of Canaan. In this story, Isaac called Esau and instructed him to go out and hunt some game for him, after which the traditional blessing would take place. Rebekah overheard, so instructed Jacob to make a goat stew and deceive his father and thereby receive the blessing (the Jacob had already obtained from Esau in 25:29 – 34). Jacob was named the primary inheritor and was promised that his siblings would serve him. Rebekah even disguised Jacob so the nearly-blind Isaac would be fooled. Jacob clearly lied to his father about his identity (27:19 and 24). So, Jacob received the blessing (27:27 – 29). Then, Esau came back and the ruse was exposed, illustrating that Jacob (deceiver) had been well named. Esau received a blessing, but not one of leadership, rather a prediction that his descendants would be at war a lot, and would serve the children of Jacob at times, but at other times would be independent. This is exactly how the history of Israel and Edom developed from 1400 – 500 BC. However, later God would predict that Edom would not come back after the Babylonian Captivity, which is what happened. Naturally, this angered Esau, so he plotted to kill Jacob after their father had died. Rebekah heard about it, so sent Jacob to her brother Laban for safekeeping. Further, she hoped that Jacob would find a wife among Laban's people, avoiding Esau's marriage alliance problem with the future Canaanites whom the Israelites would destroy under Joshua.

Chapter 28

- 28:1 – 9, Whether Rebekah coached Isaac about the marriage alliance problem, or if Isaac came to the same conclusion as Rebekah on his own is not given. Isaac was also concerned that Jacob would marry a Canaanite and thereby cause a problem for the future inheritance of Canaan by his descendants. So, Isaac sent Jacob to Uncle Laban so that he could find a wife among his first cousins. Esau also heard about the instructions to Jacob about a wife,

so he concluded that his Hittite wives were the problem, so he married a half-first cousin, a daughter of Ishmael. Once again, Esau was clueless about the promises to Abraham and the relationships he should avoid with Canaanites and Arabs.

- 28:10 – 22, This is the account of Jacob's vision of a ladder to heaven, commonly called Jacob's Ladder. On his way to Uncle Laban's, Jacob had a dream about angels ascending and descending a ladder to heaven. In the dream, the promise to Abraham was re-iterated to him by God. To memorialize the location, Jacob built an altar there. Later, this became the city of Bethel (House of God). Jacob tried to manipulate God with a conditional vow, illustrating that Jacob did not quite understand the promises, that when God promises, it will happen. Instead, Jacob promised to serve God IF he made it to Laban's safely, ate well, and returned in peace to his father's house. Jacob also promised to give 10% of his profits to God, for which God had not asked.

Chapter 29

- 29:1 – 14, Jacob traveled to the country of Laban (modern-day Syria), met his daughter Rachel at the well when she brought the sheep to be watered, and was invited to stay in their home because he was a relative. Jacob stayed as a guest for a month.
- 29:15 – 30, Jacob immediately wanted to marry Rachel, who was beautiful. But, having no wealth with him (although Isaac had plenty), Jacob worked for Laban seven years as Rachel's bride price. Laban switched girls on the wedding night so that Jacob slept with Leah, the unattractive but older daughter. Jacob was probably drunk and Laban surely made sure the lights were minimal. Laban made the excuse that the younger daughter was never married first, although his bargain with Jacob clearly was for Rachel. Having slept with Leah, Jacob was stuck, so he agreed to work another seven years, but Rachel became his bride only a week after Leah. Laban gave a servant to each daughter (Zilpah and Bilhah, respectively).
- 29:31 – 35, Although Jacob was in love with Rachel, he obviously slept with Leah, also. In that time, multiple wives was common, and each had conjugal rights according to the customs of the time. God caused Leah to be quite fertile, whereas Rachel was barren. Leah produced four sons: Reuben (a son), Simeon (heard), Levi (attached), and Judah (praise).
- 30:1 – 8, Rachel, who remained childless, gave Jacob her servant Bilhah as a surrogate, as was the custom of the time. Children of that union would technically belong to Rachel. Bilhah bore two more sons: Dan (judge) and Naphthali (wrestlings).
- 30:9 – 13, Not to be outdone, Leah, who had stopped producing sons, gave Jacob her servant, Zilpah, who produced two more sons: Gad (troop) and Asher (happy). Jacob now had four wives, each of which had a turn in the rotation with Jacob.
- 30:14 – 21, Mandrakes were a popular fertility aid in that day. No scientific data exists as to whether it was actually effective of just a custom. Nevertheless, Rachel wanted some of the mandrakes found by Leah's son Reuben. Leah traded the mandrakes for some of Rachel's turns in the rotation. God again intervened and Leah produced two more sons: Issachar (wages) and Zebulun (dwelling). Also mentioned is Dinah, the only named daughter, although a reasonable probability exists that there were several others. But, Dinah will be important in a later event, so her birth was noted.
- 30:22 – 24, Finally, God corrected Rachel's fertility problem and she had Joseph (he will add). The total number of sons at that point was eleven.

- 30:25 – 43, After about 20 years (31:38) years, Jacob desired to return to the land of his father. But, he had no wealth, having worked for Laban 14 years for the bride-price of his wives and an additional six as a manager of livestock. So, Jacob made a bargain with Laban, that the solid color sheep and goats (pure-bred) would remain with Jacob, whereas the multicolored ones (cross-bred) would belong to Jacob. Laban agreed, apparently because he thought this a good deal. By reading through the next chapter, the hand of God is clearly stated. In this chapter, the hand of God is not specifically associated with Jacob's method of placing stiped poplar branches by the watering troughs, but reading the whole story shows that God caused the increase of Jacob. So, this is not just a matter of Jacob being a better manager of genetics than the sons of Laban. Although the two herds were far apart, Laban's sheep and goats kept producing speckled, so Jacob prospered and Laban lost wealth.

Chapter 31

- 31:1 – 16, After the agreement made by Jacob and Laban about the speckled sheep. Jacob prospered. Laban was upset. Jacob's sons said in verse 1, "He has acquired all this glory." The word "glory" refers to whatever it is that makes a person famous. In Laban and Jacob's case, livestock was what made the other people view someone as successful or not. (In God's case, God's glory is His character.) So, God appeared to Jacob again and confirmed that he should go back home, and that God had caused Jacob to fare so well with Laban's livestock. Jacob asked his wives how they would feel about leaving their father's house. They were completely in favor of leaving, having seen the way Jacob had been treated over the years. They believed that Jacob had received a message from God.
- 31:17 – 35, Jacob chose to leave while Laban was away, working with his sheep so as to avoid an ugly scene and further demands by Laban. The distance Jacob proposed to travel with his sheep and goats was about 500 miles (800 km). Laban heard that Jacob and family had left three days later. He pursued with a band of brothers for a week, finally catching up to them in Gilead (east of the Jordan, south of the Sea of Galilee. Jacob could only go so far per day without harming the livestock. Apparently, Laban had intentions of harming Jacob or capturing them or taking his wives (his daughters), or stealing the livestock. God intervened by warning Laban to be careful about what he said, with the obvious implication that action against Jacob would be met with a response from God. Laban's accusations were less than honest. Certainly, Jacob had left without allowing for a going-away party, but he had had very good reasons to suspect that Laban would not deal with him fairly. The one factual accusation was that Jacob had stolen his gods. These could be idols or they could be like property deeds. Either way, Rachel had stolen them without Jacob's knowledge. Jacob quickly offered to allow Laban to search the camp for his gods. Rachel claimed to be having her period and could not get up when she was really just sitting on the stolen goods. Those "household gods" are not mentioned again.
- 31:36 – 55, After Laban gave up finding his gods among Jacob's tents, Jacob lectured Laban on all the ways he had been treated badly in the previous 20 years: (1) he had been amazingly effective as a livestock manager but had not been appropriately compensated or even appreciated, (2) Jacob took the loss if a head of livestock went missing, whether killed by predators or stolen, (3) Jacob had worked very hard under all kinds of bad conditions, (4) Laban had changed the conditions of Jacob's agreement ten times, and (5) if God had not threatened Laban, Laban would have done Jacob and his family harm. So, Jacob

proposed that they build a monument to mark a boundary between them. Neither would cross the boundary, swearing that God would harm the one who broke the promise. In many churches, a benediction is spoken at the time of dismissal, “May the Lord watch between me and thee while we are absent one from another.” (31:49) In its context, this is a threat of harm by God to the one who crosses the boundary.

Chapter 32

- 32:1 – 2, The importance of meeting the angels of God is not given. No details are in the text. However, the name that Jacob gave to the place, Mahanaim (two camps) most likely refers to the way Jacob divided his wives and possessions into two camps in case Esau came and attacked; at least some would survive.
- 32:3 – 8, Jacob sent messengers ahead to inform Esau of his coming, since Esau’s last communication was that he would kill Jacob if given the opportunity (27:41). The messengers discovered that Esau was already on the way with 400 men, which worried Jacob even more. Therefore, he divided his family between two camps.
- 32:9 – 12, Jacob prayed to God for deliverance from Esau, revealing that Jacob understood that he had not been faithful or godly in the past, but relied on the fact that he was the chosen of Isaac, son of Abraham, to whom God had made promises. Jacob included God’s order to leave Laban and return to Palestine as a reason to expect God’s deliverance.
- 32:13 – 21, Jacob sent a series of livestock herds as presents to Esau, to arrive separately to magnify the size of the gift. These were designed to appease Esau.
- 32:22 – 32, Jacob sent everyone across the Jabbok River (half-way between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, entering the Jordan from the east) but he himself stayed on the north side. This seems a cowardly move, leaving all his possessions, wives, and children to be encountered first by Esau. That night, a man appeared and wrestled with Jacob until dawn. Jacob must have been good at wrestling, because the man was not winning. So, the man touched Jacob’s hip and put it out of joint. Jacob kept wrestling, even though the man wanted to leave. Jacob must have known that this was at least an angel because he said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” At this point, the man renames Jacob as Israel (Prince with God) and let’s Jacob know that he had been wrestling with God. Jacob asked God His name, but God did not answer, rather just offering a blessing. Jacob renamed the place Peniel (Face of God). Jacob crossed the river at dawn, limping from the damage to his hip. This encounter resulted in the tradition that the Israelites do not eat the muscle of the hip socket in remembrance.

Chapter 33

- 33:1 – 3, Jacob saw Esau and 400 men approaching in the distance. So, Jacob sent the concubines, then wives, with himself following (each wife with her children). Finally Jacob moved to the front and began bowing to his approaching brother, hoping to forestall violence.
- 33:4 – 11, Esau had gotten over the deceit of the past and greeted Jacob warmly. Jacob introduced all his wives with his children. Esau asked about the livestock that had been sent ahead. Jacob confirmed that these small herds were gifts. Esau tried to decline, but Jacob insisted that Esau keep them, so he did.

- 33:12 – 17, Esau wanted to bring Jacob and family all the way to his land south of the Dead Sea. But Jacob used the excuse that the children and the livestock were too tired for that and insisted that Esau go home. Jacob promised to visit soon. Jacob moved back north of the Jabbok and built a house and livestock pens. The pens were called “booths,” which in Hebrew was Succoth. So, the subsequent city was named Succoth.
- 33:18 – 20, Then Jacob went to a nearby city, Shechem, about 10 miles each of the Jordan, and bought some land from a local man where Jacob then pitched his tents. He also built an altar which he called “God, the God of Israel.” Now Jacob had a presence on both sides of the Jordan, in the middle part (between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea). He did not visit Esau as he had promised. Jacob and Esau will meet again when their father, Isaac, dies at the end of chapter 35.

Chapter 34

- 34:1 – 31, The story of Dinah. Dinah, a daughter of Leah and Jacob, was raped by the prince of the neighboring city, Shechem. He also was enamored of Dinah, so asked his father to ask Jacob for her as a wife. From the honorable behavior of Prince Shechem after the rape, we should assume that he considered his actions normal in his culture. Of course, Jacob was informed of the rape by Dinah. But, he kept silent because his sons were all away from the tents tending to livestock. When his sons returned and heard about the rape, they were very angry, but let Jacob lead in the interactions with the king and the prince. King Hamor proposed the marriage. Prince Shechem made an open-ended offer as to the bride price – whatever Jacob asked he would give. Further, King Hamor proposed that Jacob's tribe join the city-state of Shechem through intermarriage. The sons of Jacob proposed the bride price: circumcision (the Canaanites were not circumcised). Hamor took the proposal back to the men of the city, who agreed because Jacob was rich and the prospect of intermarriage was economically attractive. Of course, the sons of Jacob were acting deceitfully. On the third day after the circumcision of all the men of Shechem, Simeon and Levi, who were two of Dinah's six full brothers among the eleven (along with, presumably, all of their servants and perhaps even some of their sons) attacked the city of Shechem and killed all the males. Then, all of Jacob's eleven sons (Benjamin was not born yet) joined in and took all the livestock and valuables and enslaved all the women and children. Presumably, some of the slaves would be kept, but most would be sold. Jacob was upset by this violent response to Dinah's rape because he was afraid that the surrounding Canaanites would band together and kill Jacob's clan. But, that did not happen because (35:5) the surrounding peoples were afraid of Jacob's God. However, Jacob remembered this event and, in his blessings of the individual sons in chapter 49, he specifically removed their inheritance of a tract of land in the Promised Land. True to the blessing, Simeon was allotted a territory within Judah, and Levi received 48 cities scattered around the nation.

Chapter 35

- 35:1 – 4, Not long after the slaughter at Shechem, God told Jacob to move the camp to Bethel, where Jacob had promised to follow God if he returned safely from his trip to Uncle Laban, when he was fleeing from the wrath of Esau. Jacob announced the move and ordered everyone to give up their idols. Apparently, the teraphim stolen by Rachel (31:30 – 35) were not only idols among the family members. The various members gave up their

idols, which Jacob buried near Shechem. They also gave Jacob gold earrings. Perhaps these announced which idols they worshipped. Jacob also told them to purify themselves and to change their clothes. This purification had no known ritual (the Law of Moses was still centuries in the future). Symbolically, they were completely ridding themselves of those idols.

- 35:5 – 7, Jacob and clan travelled to Bethel (called Luz in that day) under God's protection. Whether God made a new effort to frighten the Canaanites, or if this fear was from the well-known history of Abraham, Isaac, and Esau in the area, is unknown. At the place where he had seen the ladder reaching into heaven (28:11 – 22), he built an altar which he named God of the House of God.
- 35:8, Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried near Bethel. The placement in the text is odd since no mention of a meeting between Isaac and Jacob has been made. But, Isaac must be camped in close proximity to have made a burial there.
- 35:9 – 15, God repeated to Jacob (28:13) the land promise originally made to Abraham (12:7, 13:15) and renewed to Isaac (26:3 – 4). Jacob set up a pillar at that spot to commemorate the event and called it Bethel, House of God.
- 35:16 – 20, On the way to Bethlehem (formerly Ephrath), Rachel gave birth to Benjamin. Unfortunately, Rachel died as a result of that birth. As she was dying, she named the boy Ben-Oni, Son of My Sorrow. Jacob changed it to Benjamin, Son of the Right Hand. Oddly, centuries later, the tribe of Benjamin would be known for their predominance of left-handed people. Jacob set up a pillar on her grave that was still in place in the days of Moses.
- 35:21 – 29, Jacob camped just beyond Bethlehem, near the tower of Eder (a tower for watching over flocks). At that place, Reuben lay with Bilhah, Rachel's maid. The age difference was significant. Reuben was the first born of Jacob, but Bilhah would have been full grown when Reuben was born, so at least a 15-year age gap. Jacob brought up this event when he blessed his sons just before he died (49:4), announcing the Reuben would never be successful. A concise list of the twelve sons is given here, conveniently referencing their respective mothers. Jacob finally went down to Hebron to visit his father. Shortly thereafter, Isaac died at the age of 180. Jacob and Esau buried him.