

# **Genesis Encounters:** Stories and Study Guide

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# CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>THE GARDEN OF BLESSING.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Good and Very Good .....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>The First Home .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Bible Study.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>World Scripture Study .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<b>HOW THINGS WENT WRONG.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<i>The First Sin .....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Cain and Abel.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Bible Study.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>World Scripture Study .....</i>	<i>20</i>
<b>NOAH AND HIS FAMILY .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<i>God Calls Noah .....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>The Great Flood .....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Troubles Return .....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Bible Study.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>World Scripture .....</i>	<i>27</i>
<b>THE FAMILIES OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<i>God and Abram .....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Abram and His Neighbors .....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Abram and the Offering.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Sarai and Hagar.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>The Angels and Abraham .....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>The Angels and Lot.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Abimelech and Sarah.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Isaac and Ishmael.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>The Angel and Hagar.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Abimelech and Abraham .....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Abraham and Isaac .....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Abraham and the Men of Hebron.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Isaac and Rebekah.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Abraham and Keturah.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Rebekah and Her Sons .....</i>	<i>37</i>

<i>Isaac and His Neighbors</i> .....	38
<i>Isaac and His Sons</i> .....	39
<i>God and Jacob</i> .....	40
<i>Jacob and His Wives</i> .....	41
<i>Jacob and Laban</i> .....	42
<i>The Angel and Jacob</i> .....	43
<i>Jacob and Esau</i> .....	44
<i>Jacob and His Neighbors</i> .....	44
<i>God Blesses Jacob</i> .....	45
<i>Joseph and His Family</i> .....	46
<i>Tamar and Her Father-in-Law</i> .....	47
<i>Joseph and Potiphar</i> .....	48
<i>Joseph and the Prisoners</i> .....	48
<i>Joseph and the Pharaoh</i> .....	49
<i>Joseph and the Food Supplies</i> .....	50
<i>Benjamin and His Brothers</i> .....	52
<i>Joseph and His Brothers</i> .....	53
<i>Joseph Welcomes Jacob</i> .....	54
<i>Jacob Blesses Pharaoh</i> .....	54
<i>Joseph Governs Egypt</i> .....	55
<i>Jacob Blesses His Sons</i> .....	55
<i>Bible Study</i> .....	57
<i>World Scripture Study</i> .....	59
<b>CREATIVE ACTIVITIES</b> .....	<b>61</b>

# PREFACE

I grew up with stories. Some were make believe. Some were about real people. The Christianity I grew up with was about stories.

When our children were little, my Mennonite parents gave me a Bible storybook to read to them, but there was so much more to tell.

What if Eve hadn't eaten the apple? What if Cain hadn't killed his brother? What if everything had gone right after the flood? What if Joseph's brothers hadn't sold him? Would history have turned out any better? And why were the women so often short-changed?

As my horizons expanded, I learned about the Jewish tradition of midrash, retelling stories as a way of shedding light on age-old questions. I learned that the Muslims tell the stories differently. I'm intrigued by the "what ifs" of the Unification Church and the Episcopal lectionary combinations of readings from the Old Testament, the Psalms, the Epistles, and the Gospels.

This is a storybook about the first families of the Bible, beginning with Adam and his family and continuing through Jacob and his 12 sons. In those times people met God in their garden, angels at their tent door, a stairway to heaven at a resting stone, and their future wife at a well. It's like a soap opera with colorful casts of husband and wife, brother and brother, father and son, mother and son, uncle and nephew, boss and servant, guard and prisoner, father-in-law and son-in-law. The divine endowments of breath and blessings were to be cherished and passed on, but brothers killed or tried to kill each other. Like people of all times, the members of these families whom God called to special missions had to figure out how to get along with each other and their neighbors, how to survive under adversity, and perhaps most important, how to keep from selling their eternal birthright to satisfy the hunger of the hour.

At the end of the sections are study questions tracing the themes of this first book throughout other parts of the Bible. Other questions launch provocative interreligious pilgrimages with references to chapters of *World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts* (see [origin.org/ucs](http://origin.org/ucs)). Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are called Abrahamic faiths because they honor Abraham as the father of faith. Thus, the themes of Genesis are a familiar legacy. While understandings differ, one can respect and honor spiritual treasures in each faith. There are also some fascinating resonances in the fundamentals texts of India and China and the religious traditions of Africa and the Americas.

The themes of ideals, broken relationships, and restoration animate all religion and indeed all great literature. I think Genesis is about encounters, perhaps a grand ballet—God with us, us with God, each other, and the creation.

The final pages of this book contain questions to stimulate your creative imagination. Try putting yourself in the sandals of the patriarchs and matriarchs and the people around them, named and unnamed. Space is provided for writing answers, but you may prefer other media such as music, drawing, dance, clay, quilting, photography, video, choreography, and games.

According to Genesis, we began as a family living in a garden and strayed from our origins, causing grief to ourselves and to God and wreaking havoc on the environment. Now, with the increasing flow of information, trade, resources, and migration, it's clear that the earth is our common home. The creation story

tells us that we received our body and spirit by the grace of God and were endowed with God's blessing. It's time we focus on learning to live as one family under God.

# THE GARDEN OF BLESSING

## Good and Very Good

Genesis 1:1 - 2:3

Long, long ago, before there was an earth, before the sun, moon and stars could be seen, before there were any plants, animals or people, there was God. Before there was time, there was God. He has always been the same unchanging God.

God is energy. His energy fills all things. God is love. There is meaning and value in the world because God made it with love. God's love was so great that He dreamed of having a son and daughter whom He could love and who would love Him in return.

When parents are expecting a child they make everything ready for the baby's coming. God made this world to be His children's home. God had a plan, and he carried it out step by step.

In the darkness and emptiness, God's spirit began to move and work. God planned a bright and wondrous world, so He said, "Let there be light." And there was light. When God saw the light He said it was good. He called the light day and the darkness night. Night follows day, and day follows night. In both we remember God. We mark time by these changes. That was the first day.

God separated the upper and lower waters, making the clear blue sky and putting clouds in it. Like the light, God said it was good. Living things need light, air and water. That was the second day.

God separated the seas from the dry land. Volcanoes burst through the ground, and mountains stretched up towards the sky. On the land trees and all kinds of plants began to grow. Buds opened up into flowers, the flowers bloomed and faded, and fruits grew where the flowers had been. In time, the fruits fell to the ground, the seeds inside them sprouted, and more plants appeared. Plants give us food and decorate our world. Flowers make the world a fragrant and colorful place. God called all these things good. That was the third day.

God had more in mind for His children's home. He made the sun and the moon, solar systems and galaxies. The sun rules during the day and the moon during night. God called them good. These heavenly bodies are the signs for the seasons and the years. That was the fourth day.

God made the fish swimming in the seas and the birds flying in the sky. To see them, we look deep into the water and high into the skies. The fish and the birds make the world a better place. One bird heard another bird singing its song. They met, built a nest together, laid eggs, and sat on them. In time new birds pecked holes in the shells, wiggled out, and stretched their wings in the fresh, clear air. With the coming of the birds, there was music on the earth. That was the fifth day.

Still something was missing. God said, "Let the earth bring forth living things," and all kinds of animals and creeping things began to appear on the land. God's children would have many kinds of helpers and playmates, and they would learn much from the animals. Again, God said that it was good.

The earth was like a museum with no visitors, a playground without children, a palace that had never been lived in. It was a long time in the making, and at last a home was ready for God's children.

God made His son and daughter in His image. When God looked at them, it was like looking at Himself in a mirror. They could share God's thoughts, God's hopes, God's dreams, and most of all, God's heart. God blessed them and told them to be fruitful, multiply and have dominion over the earth. With these blessings, God intended His children to develop all the potential He gave them of harmony in body and spirit, in family life, and in their environment.

God saw everything that He had made, and He said that it was very good. That was the sixth day. Everything was very good. On the seventh day, when He had finished the work of creation, God rested.

## **The First Home**

Genesis 2:4 - 25

We cannot see God with our eyes, but He is real. Think about the wind. We cannot see it, but we can feel it and watch what it does. The creation shows us what God has done. Deep in our hearts we can feel God. When our mind is still, we can hear His voice.

God made His son from the things of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life. We may look something like animals. Like the animals, we have instincts that help us survive. But we have something that no animal has, because God breathed His spirit into us. This connects us with God. Just as we can see, hear, smell, taste and touch the physical world around us, God wanted us to see, hear, smell, taste and touch the beauty of our eternal home, the spiritual world and interact with the angels, spiritual beings who are God's messengers and servants.

From the physical world we find food for our bodies. God's word and God's love feeds our spirits. Our bodies will die but our spirits will live on. In each of us is a bit of heaven and a bit of earth. God is not far off in the sky, but as close to us as our breath.

God made the world in pairs: light and darkness, water above us and water below us, dry land and seas, light for the day and light for the night, fish and birds, land animals and creeping things. He designed flowers with stamens and pistils. He made male and female animals. God blessed the plants and animals with the power to grow, multiply and fill the earth.

God made a Garden home for His children, and in the middle of it He placed a pair of trees, the tree of life and tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river watered the Garden, and precious stones sparkled in the sunlight.

God told His children to work in the Garden and take care of everything in it. In the Garden God's children were free to explore and learn all kinds of things. To protect them while they were growing in love, God warned His children not to eat the fruit of tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

In his work of creation, God gave names to the day and night, the heaven and the earth, and the seas. God named His son Adam. God wanted His children to learn to know the animals and take care of them, so He let His children name the animals.

Everything that could be seen had a companion but Adam. God's work of creation would not be finished until He had both a son and a daughter. As the final act of creation, God made His daughter, Eve, from the same flesh and bone as Adam. These first two children would grow up, and from them would come all the rest of God's children.

Just as God is our invisible, heavenly Parent, Adam and Eve were to become the visible, true parents to their children. From that first family, the circles of love would keep growing, like the rippling waves that spread out from a pebble tossed into a pool of water, making the Garden home into the Kingdom of Heaven.

God and all the angels watched in fascination as Adam and Eve grew. Every day, they discovered new things. God was so close to them that they walked and talked together every day. They didn't wear any clothes. They had nothing to hide from each other or from God.

## **Bible Study**

The first and second chapters of Genesis record two different accounts of the creation. How would you describe the differences in emphasis between the two stories?

Read chapters 38 through 40 of Job. What aspects of the creative process are described, and what images are used for the Creator?

What is the role of the Word (Logos) in creation? (John 1:1-5)

How can one explain the passage in Colossians (1:15-19) which states that the world was created by Christ?

The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) are the basis of Jewish and Christian ethics. List them:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

8.

9.

10.

Which commandments deal with vertical relationships?

Which commandments deal with horizontal relationships?

What do the following Biblical references teach about perfecting our relationship with God?

Job 1:1 -

Psalm 101:2-4 -

Matthew 5:48 -

John 17:23 -

I John 4:16-18 -

What do the following references teach about mind-body unity?

Matthew 19:21 -

I Corinthians 2:16 -

James 3:2 -

What can we learn about the relationship between man and woman from the following passages of Genesis?

Genesis 1:27 -

Genesis 2:18 -

Genesis 2:21-24 -

Genesis 3:16 -

Genesis 3:20 -

Genesis 18:12 -

Compare the Genesis references with key New Testament teachings about marriage. (Several of these passages refer back to Genesis 2:21-24.)

Mark 10:1-12 -

I Corinthians 7:1-40 -

Ephesians 5:22-33 -

I Peter 3:1-7 -

What do the following passages say about the relationship between parents and children?

Exodus 20:12 -

Deuteronomy 6:7 -

Psalms 127:3-4 -

Proverbs 22:6 -

Ephesians 6:1-4 -

What do the following passages teach about humankind's relationship to the creation?

Genesis 1:28 -

Genesis 2:7 -

Genesis 2:15 -

Genesis 2:19 -

Genesis 3:19 -

Genesis 3:21 –

Genesis 4:10 -

Jeremiah 17:9 -

Acts 14:17 -

Romans 1:19-20 -

Romans 8:19-22 -

Revelation 21:1-5 -

What understanding of our spiritual nature can be derived from the following passages?

Job 10:11 -

Matthew 17:2-3 -

I Corinthians 15:44 –

## World Scripture Study

Read the creation stories in World Scripture Chapter 1, “The Creator.” What images are used to describe the Creator?

Zoroastrianism -

Islam -

African Traditional Religions -

Hinduism -

Sikhism -

Confucianism -

Which religions do not have creation stories because they do not teach about a Creator God?

In Genesis, creation starts with God’s word. How do other accounts describe the beginning of creation?

Islam -

African Traditional Religions -

Hinduism -

Sikhism -

Confucianism -

Chapter 1 of World Scripture, entitled “Ultimate Reality,” includes sections on formlessness, transcendence, sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience, immanence, eternalness, creatorship, goodness and love, Divine Parent. Some traditions emphasize God’s continuing activity as sustaining the cosmos. Give examples.

Zoroastrianism -

Islam -

African Traditional Religions -

Tahitian Traditional Religion -

Sikhism -

Hinduism -

What do the following religions teach about polarity? (See Chapter 2, “Polarity, Relationality, and Interdependence.”)

Christianity -

Islam -

Judaism -

Shintoism -

Buddhism -

What religion regards matter as something to be transcended?

What do the following religious traditions say about universal law and the foundation for existence? (See Chapter 2, “Eternal Truth.”)

Islam -

Judaism -

Christianity -

Hinduism -

Buddhism -

Taoism -

Sikhism -

Most religions teach a single standard of moral law that applies to all people. Which major religion teaches different standards for people depending on their social status, stage of life, or inborn nature?

See Chapter 2, “The Decalogue.”

What are the sacred duties of a Muslim?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Which ones deal with vertical relationships?

Which ones deal with horizontal relationships?

What is Eightfold Path that Buddhism teaches as the means to end suffering?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

What precepts are common to Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism?

State the Golden Rule or principle of reciprocity found in the following religions. (Chapter 2, “The Golden Rule.”)

Judaism (Leviticus 19:18) -

Christianity (Matthew 7:12) -

Islam (Forty Hadith of an-Nawawi 13) -

Jainism (Sutrakritanga 1.11.13) -

Confucianism (Analects 15.23) -

Hinduism (Anusasana Parva 113.8) -

Buddhism (Sutta Nipata 705) -

African Traditional Religions (Yoruba Proverb) -

Which religions consider all kinds of desire, even the grasping for existence itself, to be harmful? (Chapter 7, “Selfish Desire, Lust, and Greed.”)

What unique emphasis does Buddhism place on the responsibility of children? (Chapter 4, “Parents and Children.”)

What do the following religious traditions teach about the husband-wife relationship? (Chapter 4, “Husband and Wife.”)

Sikhism -

Hinduism -

Judaism -

Confucianism -

Islam -

Native American Religions -

What insights do the following religious traditions offer about the relationship between humankind and the creation? (Chapter 5, “The Sanctity of Nature.”)

Buddhism -

Christianity -

Confucianism -

Islam -

Jainism -

Judaism -

Hinduism -

Taoism -

African Traditional Religions -

Native American Religions -

What do the following religious traditions teach about human responsibility? (Chapter 12, “Individual Responsibility.”)

Buddhism -

Christianity -

Confucianism -

Islam -

Jainism -

Judaism -

Hinduism -

What unique insights do the following religious traditions offer on the nature of the spiritual world? (Chapter 6, “The Spiritual World.”)

Islam -

Christianity -

Sikhism -

Hinduism -

Confucianism -

Judaism -

Buddhism -

African Traditional Religions -

Native American Religions –

# HOW THINGS WENT WRONG

## The First Sin

Genesis 3:1 - 24

Everything that God made developed according to His plan. Then a serpent took a special interest in Eve. He asked her, "Did God say that you shall not eat from all the trees in the Garden?" Now the serpent was not a literal animal, because animals cannot talk to people or understand God's plan. The serpent symbolized an angel. God had told His children they could eat the fruit of all the trees but one. The angel's question twisted God's words.

Eve answered, "We may eat the fruit from the trees of the Garden; but God said if we ate or even touched the fruit from the tree in the middle of the Garden, we would die."

The angel then told Eve a lie: "You will not die. God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil."

God made angels to be servants. Knowing God's plan, and they were to live by it and encourage God's children to live by it. The angel's conversations with Eve drew her focus to him rather than to God and to Adam, her intended husband. Nothing is of greater value than true love, and nothing causes more pain than when love is betrayed. God had poured all His heart and love into Adam and Eve. To protect them from distractions until their hearts were mature, God told them not to eat the fruit.

The archangel knew many things, and Eve wanted the special knowledge the archangel had promised. They connected through their spiritual senses. What Eve learned from the archangel was false, self-centered love. She turned to Adam and drew him to her in the same way the angel enticed her. They separated themselves from God's love, which is spiritual death. Looking at themselves and realized that they were naked, and they covered the parts of their body that were meant to be holy.

Adam and Eve became afraid of God. They looked for a hiding place among the trees of the Garden. Because God is invisible, He is everywhere but He wants a special time of closeness to each one of His children.

God came visiting in the Garden as He always did. But this time the two frightened and lonely children hid. Soon they heard a voice calling, "Adam, where are you?" Adam answered, "Lord, I heard your voice and I was afraid, so I hid." Nobody can hide from God. "Why are you afraid to meet me?" God asked. "Did you do what I told you not to do?" Adam blamed someone else for his sin. "The woman made me do it," he answered.

"What have you done?" God asked Eve. She didn't want to take responsibility for her actions either. "The archangel tempted me to do it," she told God.

God punished the archangel, who became known as Satan, and told him he could no longer live in the heavenly realm. Ever since, Satan has been God's enemy. Satan makes life difficult for anybody who wants to connect with God. God always gives His children hope. God promised that some day one of Eve's descendants would win the victory over Satan and lead humankind back to God.

God wanted Eve to find great happiness in loving her husband and children. But because she turned away from true love, God told Eve there would be sorrow in her family. God wanted Adam to find great

happiness in caring for the earth and its growing things. But because he turned away from true love, God told him that it would be difficult even to get food to eat.

Our Heavenly Father made us to be His children and experience true love. But Adam and Eve experienced false love, which leads to disharmony and conflict. God's heart was full of sorrow and pain because His children left the way of true love. Sin enticed God's children away from their loving home. Of all the tears that flowed because of the fall, God cried the most. God showed His children that He still cared deeply for them. He made clothes out of animal skins for Adam and Eve before sending them out of the Garden.

We grow up, marry, have children, and work to make a living, but we are outside the garden where we can enjoy God's original love and blessing.

As the true ancestor of all people on earth, Adam would have been like a tree of life, giving godly life and love to all his descendants. After the fall, an angel with a sword of fire blocked the way to the tree of life. The garden home was empty.

## **Cain and Abel**

Genesis 4:1 - 26

Because Adam and Eve turned away from God, their life changed. Adam had to work long and hard to get food for Eve and himself. Thorns ripped his hands and feet, and weeds grew faster than the plants that gave them food. Adam and Eve didn't feel God walking with them. They didn't hear God talking to them. They missed God. Looking at all the wonderful things that God had made reminded them of their Heavenly Father, and they wanted to do something to make up for their sin.

Adam and Eve had left their position as God's pure children. Plants and animals, which did not turn away from God, were closer to God than Adam and Eve. The first step back to God was to make offerings from the things of creation.

God created Adam and Eve, but they had chosen to follow Satan. God could not accept an offering from them, because they were pulled in two opposite directions, one good and the other evil. They had broken God's heart when they turned away from Him, and it takes time for broken hearts to heal. God's children had disobeyed Him, and they would have to believe in God and obey Him even in difficult circumstances in order to show God that He could trust them.

Adam and Eve had a baby, and Eve named him Cain. They had another baby, and his name was Abel. The birth of a baby is like a new beginning. God planned for these first two sons to begin to untangle the mess that sin had made of their parents' lives.

As Cain and Abel grew, their parents talked to them about God. They hoped their sons would try to please God. Cain began to work in the fields, like his father, and Abel took care of sheep.

The young men built an altar and offered gifts to God to show their faith in him. Cain brought grain from the field for his offering, and Abel brought a fat lamb. They brought the best they had. God accepted Abel's offering. However, God did not accept Cain's offering.

The angel couldn't appreciate the love God had for His children and eventually caused their spiritual death. If Cain could have sensed God's love and appreciation for Abel, perhaps they could have made an offering together and God would have showered him Cain with love, through Abel.

However, Cain became resentful and jealous when God did not accept his offering. God said to him, "Why are you angry? Why do you look so upset? If you do well, you will be accepted. If you do not, sin lies at the door. Don't let sin get hold of you. You should rule over it instead." Satan was at the door, waiting for Cain to get angry. But God also was knocking at the door of Cain's heart, waiting to bless Cain if he united with his brother. Perhaps Abel was so pleased that God accepted his offering that he did not care about Cain's feelings.

Later, when the brothers were out in a field, Cain argued with Abel. Cain became so angry that he killed Abel. When Cain killed his brother, he followed the example of Satan, who caused Adam and Eve to die spiritually. Still God did not give up on Cain. God spoke to Cain again. He asked, "Where is Abel, your brother?" God knew what had happened, but He wanted to give Cain a chance to think about what he did.

However, the door of Cain's heart was closed, and he lied to God. Cain told God, "I do not know. Am I supposed to take care of my brother?" Cain thought he had gotten rid of Abel by killing him, but people's spirits keep living on after the body dies. God said that Abel's blood cried out to Him from the ground.

God told Cain, "Because you have done wrong, you will be punished. You will work in the fields, but the crops will be poor. You will wander here and there without any place to call your home."

Cain said, "O God, this punishment is greater than I can bear! What if people try to kill me when I go around from place to place?" God answered that He would put a mark on Cain to let people know that they should not hurt him.

God had lost His children when they turned away from Him to follow Satan. Now Adam and Eve lost their first two children: one was dead and the other had to leave home. Just as God had said, Eve's children brought her grief.

Adam and Eve lived to be very old, and they had many other children. God doesn't change His plan. If one person doesn't carry it out, God wills another person to take that place. God gave Adam and Eve another son, Seth, to take the place of Abel.

Abel had shown his faith in God by making a good offering. But Cain and Abel could not unite. Thus, God looked for another family and through them tried to make a new beginning of goodness.

## **Bible Study**

What does the tree symbolize in the following passages?

Psalm 1:1-3 -

Isaiah 11:1 -

John 15:5 -

Romans 11:17 -

Revelation 22:2 -

How do the following passages connect Adam and the Messiah?

Romans 5:12-19 -

I Corinthians 15:45 -

Describe the roles of key archangels:

Michael (Daniel 10, Jude 9, Revelation 12:7) -

Gabriel (Daniel 8:16-27, 9:21-27, Luke 1:11-38) -

The Bible speaks about sin in graphic terms. According to James 1:14, "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." Fallen nature (expressed here as lust) lies within us, like combustible matter; the temptation (expressed here as enticement) is like the spark that ignites our lust if we allow ourselves to be drawn toward it. What is the final outcome of sin, according to James 1:15?

In the following stories told by Jesus, what types of fallen nature are described?

The Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35) -

The Wicked Husbandmen (Matthew 21:33-43) -

The Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) -

The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) -

The Good Shepherd (John 10:1-21) -

What indications are there in Genesis 3 of God's parental love?

At the core of Jesus' teaching is the love of God, the Heavenly Father, for His lost children (Luke 15:11-32). How do the following Old Testament passages contribute to our understanding of God as a parent?

Deuteronomy 1:31 -

Isaiah 1:2 -

Isaiah 63:8-16 -

Hosea 11:1-4 -

Malachi 1:6 -

Malachi 2:10 -

## **World Scripture Study**

In the Jewish tradition what insights are offered into the role of angels? (Chapter 5, "The Lord of Spirits," and Chapter 6, "Spiritual Error and the Occult.")

In the Islamic tradition what insights are offered into the role of angels? (See above, plus Chapter 2, "Cosmic Justice," and Chapter 6, "Passage Beyond.")

See Chapter 8, "The Human Fall."

What are the parallels between Genesis and the Qur'an in the motivation, process and results of the fall away from God's ideal?

Motivation -

Process -

Results -

What unique viewpoints of the fall are found in the Qur'an?

In which religious traditions does sexual misconduct play a part in the fall?

What do the three stories from African Traditional Religions have in common?

What was the motivation of the fall in the Hindu accounts?

How does the Book of Mormon explain the human fall as part of God's plan?

Christians often attribute the root of sin to pride or selfish desire, rather than to the failure to fulfill the responsibility of keeping the commandment. Buddhism traces the roots of human suffering to desire. Is there a place for good desires?

According to the Jewish tradition, what effect did the fall have on Adam's offspring? (See World Scripture, above.)

What degraded human qualities are listed in World Scripture? (Chapter 8, "Degraded Human Nature")

What is the significance of making an offering in the following religious traditions? (Chapter 17, "Offering.")

Hinduism -

Islam -

Judaism -

Buddhism -

Confucianism -

Shintoism -

How are the contradictions in human nature described in the following religions? (Chapter 7, "Ignorance.")

Hinduism -

Jainism -

Buddhism -

Zoroastrianism -

Islam -

Native American -

Judaism -

Sikhism -

Confucianism -

# NOAH AND HIS FAMILY

## God Calls Noah

Genesis 4:16 - 6:22

Adam and Eve's first son, Cain, had children, and they had children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Cain had many descendants. Some were cattle herders and lived in tents; others were musicians; still others made things out of brass and iron. However, they did not love God, and they did not teach their children to love God. They killed people, and they were proud of doing so.

God's hope was in Seth. He was the third son of Adam and Eve, and his descendants worshipped God.

People lived long lives in those times, and some grew very tall; but so many of them thought only about evil and they did only evil things. Their hearts were full of sin. Looking into the hearts and lives of all these people, God was sorry that He had made people, and His heart was broken. God planned to make a fresh start, getting rid of the sin and evil in the world by sending a vast flood.

God found a good man named Noah from among Seth's descendants, and God had great hopes for him. Even among all those evil people, Noah always tried to do what was right. He was a good man and walked with God. In everything he did, he always thought about God. He also taught his sons to do what was right. This pleased God.

God chose Noah to make an offering to show his faith. He told Noah about His plan to destroy the evil world and make a new beginning. He promised Noah that he and his family would not be destroyed along with the evil people.

"Build an ark," God told Noah. He told Noah what kind of wood to use, how big to make it, how to keep water from getting into it, and where to put the door and window.

"When it is finished you and your sons and your wife and your son's wives will go into the ark," God added. "You will live there until the flood is over." God told him to bring a male and a female of every kind of animal into the ark. God also told Noah to bring into the ark enough food for all the people and the animals.

Because Noah believed God, he began building the ark. While other people went their evil ways, Noah and his sons—Shem, Ham and Japheth—worked on the ark.

To ordinary people, the ark looked like a three-story houseboat sitting high up on dry land, but to God it was a symbol of His hope for a brand new beginning on earth. Patiently, day after day, year after year, decade after decade, Noah continued working on the ark as his offering of faith in God.

People must have laughed at Noah and his family, but he was not upset. People must have thought he was foolish, but he kept on working. There was no water anywhere near the boat. Maybe his wife and children sometimes thought he was crazy and didn't want to help him. Still, Noah obeyed God and kept working on the ark.

Again and again, Noah talked to the people and warned them to stop doing evil or a terrible flood would destroy them. None of them believed him.

## The Great Flood

Genesis 7:1 - 9:19

When everything was ready, God told Noah it was time for him and his family to enter the ark. Noah was six hundred years old.

Like a parent, God called His children to come indoors so they would be safe from the coming storm. He told Noah to bring two of every kind of animal, bird and creeping thing to enter the ark. The animals followed Noah because God was working through Noah. Animals that were naturally enemies would live together in peace for many months.

God told Noah that the rain would begin seven days later and that it would continue raining for forty days. Just as God had said, the rain began to fall. Great sheets of water poured down from the clouds. The creeks filled up, and rivers flowed over their banks. People left their homes and ran up into the hills. Now they knew that Noah had told the truth, but the door of the ark was closed. Frightened animals looked for shelter. Still it rained. Higher and higher the waters rose, covering the buildings, the trees, and finally the highest hills. The people and animals that were not in the ark died.

For almost six weeks it rained. Only those in the ark were safe. The rising waters lifted the ark off the ground and it began to float. For many months it floated. Then God remembered Noah and all the animals in the ark with him. God had told Noah how long the rains would last, but He did not say when the waters would go down. Still, Noah trusted God. After many months in the ark, Noah's family might have thought God had forgotten them, but He did not. The winds came and the waters began to dry up.

One day the ark bumped into top of a mountain called Ararat and stood still. The people and animals were happy to feel solid ground underneath them. Later they could see the tops of mountains appear around them, like islands.

After waiting for some time, Noah opened the window and let out a raven. With its strong wings, the bird flew around, looking for a place to call home in the new world. Noah also sent out a dove, and she returned because she could find no place to rest. After one week he sent out the dove again, and she came back in the evening with an olive leaf in her beak. Now Noah knew that the land was dry enough for trees to grow again. How happy everyone must have been to see a fresh, green leaf! A week later he sent out the dove once more. This time she did not return.

Now it was time to take the cover off the ark and look out upon the earth. It was as fresh as it was when God first made it. How delighted everyone must have been to look at the ground once again! The people and animals had been inside the ark for more than a year. God had told him when to enter the ark, and Noah waited for Him to say when they should leave.

The ground began to dry up. One day God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark, with your wife and your sons and their wives, and every living thing that is in the ark." With much joy, Noah, his family, and all the birds, animals and creeping things left the ark.

Noah was thankful to be alive. His first thought was not to build a house but to build an altar. As soon as he came out of the ark, he set up an altar and made his offering to God. God accepted the offering and made a covenant, a solemn agreement, with Noah. God said that plants and animals would be their food, but they must not eat meat with blood in it. God also established principles of justice. God repeated to Noah the

blessings given to Adam and Eve: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” God told Noah and all living things that he would never again send another flood to destroy every creature. God promised: “As long as the earth remains there will be summer and winter, seed time and harvest, and day and night.” To remind people of His promise, God set a rainbow in the sky.

Noah made his offering in faith, and God accepted it. The flood made the world fresh and clean.

## Troubles Return

Genesis 9:20 - 11:9

Noah built a home and began raising crops. After spending long years building boats and preaching to the people, after spending long months as a sailor and zookeeper, Noah became a farmer. Because Noah had faith in God, his whole family was saved from the flood. He was the first father of faith.

Noah planted a vineyard and made wine from the grapes. One day he became drunk and fell asleep inside his tent. The flood had cleansed the world, making it like a new Eden.

However, Noah's second son, Ham, saw his father lying naked in the tent and became upset. Ham was critical of his father and spread his attitude to his brothers. Shem and Japheth took a garment and walked backward into the tent and covered up their father. Even when they didn't understand the reason for something, the sons could have been patient and obeyed their father. When Noah woke up and realized what had happened, he said that Ham's youngest son, Canaan, would serve his brothers.

Noah's sons didn't trust in their father, and God looked for another father of faith and a family who could unite with him.

Shem, Ham and Japheth each had several children, and their children had children. In time, there were many people on the earth. People lived and worked together. Nimrod, the son of Ham's oldest son, became a mighty hunter and established a kingdom. People moved to the plain of Shinar and began to make bricks. "Let us build a city," they said, "and let us make a tower so great and high that its top will reach up to the sky. Then we shall not be scattered over the earth and be separated from one another."

The people set to work baking the bricks, mixing the mortar and building the walls of the city and its tower. God saw their work and was not pleased. They were thinking more and more about their own work and less and less about God. Soon they might forget God entirely and worship the things they had made. God decided to stop the project.

Until this time, all people spoke one language. Now God caused them to speak different languages. The people of one family could not understand what their neighbors were talking about. The tower, known as Babel, was never finished, because the builders could not understand one another. Finally, the people moved away in different directions, spreading throughout the earth.

## Bible Study

Read chapters 6-9 of Genesis and the book of Jonah. Compare the responses of Noah and Jonah to God's call:

Noah -

Jonah -

Compare the responses of the people to their preaching:

Noah -

Jonah -

## **World Scripture**

To what is God's grief attributed in the following religious traditions? (Chapter 8, "God's Grief")

Judaism -

Islam -

African Traditional Religions -

Buddhism -

How does the Jewish tradition describe Noah's devotion to the animals in the ark? (See World Scripture, Chapter 5, "Reverence for Life.")

# THE FAMILIES OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB

## God and Abram

Genesis 11:10 - 12:4

After the flood, people forgot God. They prayed, but not to God. Wherever they went they worshipped something. Many people worshipped what they saw up in the heavens: the sun, moon and stars. Others worshipped what they saw around them, such as the rivers, mountains and hills. Sometimes they carved images of wood or stone and called them gods.

There was a shepherd named Terah in the land of Ur. He was a descendant of Noah's first son, Shem. He had three sons: Abram, Nahor and Haran. The third son died and left a son named Lot. Terah took his family and all his cattle and sheep to a place east of Ur called Haran. There Terah died.

Terah worshipped idols, but Abram began to believe in one God. God chose Abram to be a new father of faith. One day Abram heard God's voice calling him: "Leave this country and your relatives and go to a land that I will show you. I will bless you and make a great nation out of you. You will be a blessing, and through you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

With his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, their servants and large flocks and herds, Abram set out on another trip. He was seventy-five years old. They traveled west toward the land of Canaan. They crossed mountains and valleys, rivers and dry land. Each day, they were farther from their homeland and nearer to the land God had promised to them.

## Abram and His Neighbors

Genesis 12:5 - 14:24

When they entered Canaan, they passed through the hilly land of Shechem and arrived at a plain where the Canaanites were living. Abram did not live in a city but in a tent in the countryside. Abram became a very rich man. He had many servants, cattle and sheep. He had much silver and gold. Lot also had many servants, sheep and cattle. When they put up all their tents, it looked like a tent town. All around them the land was dotted with their cattle and sheep.

God visited Abram and said, "Unto thy seed I will give this land," and Abram built an altar there to God. When he moved south to Bethel he also built an altar to God there.

He kept traveling south. When food was hard to find, they went to Egypt. Sarai was very beautiful. Abram worried that if people knew he was Sarai's husband, someone would kill him in order to marry her. So he told Sarai to pretend to be his sister. Pharaoh became interested in Sarai and took her into his house. Then he and his household began to suffer from plagues. When Pharaoh learned that Sarai was Abram's wife, he asked them to leave the country and take all their possessions with them.

They returned to Canaan. Abram's servants and Lot's servants began to argue over land for their animals. Abram talked to Lot: "I don't want there to be any arguments between us or our servants. There is not room

enough for all of us to live together. But the whole land lies before us. Let us separate. If you choose the west country, I will go east; but if you want the east country, I will take the west.”

Lot chose the east country, around in the Jordan Valley, where there was plenty of grass and water for his flocks. Lot put up his tents near the city of Sodom, where people were very evil and never thought about God. After a while, Lot moved closer to Sodom and finally went to live inside the city.

Again God visited Abraham and renewed His promises to Abram. Abram moved to the hilly land of Hebron and built an altar there.

A group of kings made war on Sodom, Gomorrah and neighboring cities. After 12 years of being servants of the invaders, the kings in the area rebelled against the invaders. But the local people were defeated and the people and belongings were carried off by the invaders. Abram's nephew Lot was one of the captives. Abram and his servants attacked the invaders and drove them off, rescuing not only Lot but also the other people and their belongings.

The king of Sodom went out to greet the victorious Abram. Melchizedek, a priest and king of Salem [the word Salem means peace], also came to greet Abram with gifts of bread and wine. Melchizedek said, "Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be the most high God who delivered your enemies into your hand." And Abram gave Melchizedek one tenth of everything he had.

The king of Sodom asked Abram to return the captives and offered to let Abram keep all the booty from the battle. However, Abram gave the credit to God, the possessor of heaven and earth, and returned to the king of Sodom everything that was his. Abram did not want the king to complain that Abram's wealth came from the king's belongings.

## **Abram and the Offering**

Genesis 15

Afterwards, God appeared to Abram in his sleep and said, “Do not be afraid, for I will protect you and will give you a great reward for your faith.”

Abram was growing old. God had been guiding and protecting him, and Abram had shown his faith in God in many ways over the years. He had left his home and gone to the land God showed him; he built altars to God wherever he lived; he had helped out Lot and other people who were in trouble; he was brave and unselfish. However, he still had no children.

Abram replied, “Lord God, what will you give me? I have no children. I have no heir.”

God told Abram to go outside. “Look toward heaven, and tell me if you can count the stars. Some day the children in your family will be like the stars—so many that no one can count them.” Abram believed God.

God told Abram to make an offering to show his faith. God asked Abram to choose a heifer, a goat, a sheep, a turtledove and a pigeon. Like the animals in Noah's ark, these animals symbolized the whole earth.

Because Adam and Eve turned away from God and followed Satan, people are torn between good and evil. People make offerings in order to cut themselves off from Satan and try to connect with God. In those days, when people prepared an offering, they were supposed to cut the animals in half. Abram cut the cow,

the goat and the sheep in half, but he did not cut the birds. God could not accept his offering, and birds of prey came to take the animals away.

Abram fell asleep, and God told him that his children, grandchildren and the people born after them would have to spend four hundred years living in another country. Their life would become difficult and they would be treated like slaves, but finally they would return to Canaan.

## **Sarai and Hagar**

Genesis 16 & 17

Sarai had an Egyptian servant girl named Hagar. Abram and Sarai taught Hagar about the true God. Abram and Sarai longed for the child that God had promised them, but they still had no children. Sarai suggested that Abram take her servant, Hagar, as a concubine, like another wife. If Sarai couldn't have a child herself, she hoped she could claim her servant's child. This was a custom in those times. However, when Hagar became pregnant, she thought she was better than Sarai.

Sarai punished Hagar so severely that Hagar ran away. Hagar walked down the sandy desert road. When she got tired, she stopped to rest by a fountain called Lahairoi. There an angel of the Lord found her.

“Hagar, Sarai's maid, where did you come from, and where are you going?” the angel asked.

“I am running away from Sarai,” Hagar replied.

“Go back,” the angel said, “and submit to Sarai. I will multiply your seed, and you will have more descendants than people can count. You are expecting a child, and you will bear a son and call him Ishmael, because the Lord has heard your suffering. He will grow up to be a strong, impatient man; he will always be fighting against others and they against him. He will live in the presence of his brothers.”

Hagar recognized that a messenger from God had spoken to her. She called him "the Lord who sees me" and realized that God had known about her all the time. She obeyed God and returned to Sarai. Her son was born, as God had promised. Abram was eighty-six years old when his son Ishmael was born.

Thirteen years later, God spoke to Abram again, repeating the blessings and the promise of a son. God gave Abram a new name, Abraham, meaning father of many nations. He also changed Sarai's name to Sarah, promising that she would be mother of many nations.

Abraham loved his son Ishmael, but Ishmael was not the child that God had been promising him. He asked God about Ishmael.

God answered: “I have heard what you asked. I have blessed him and will make him fruitful. I will multiply his descendants. He will give birth to twelve princes, and I will make a great nation out of him.”

## **The Angels and Abraham**

Genesis 18

One day, as Abraham was sitting in the door of his tent in the plain of Mamre, he saw three strangers coming towards him. It was the custom to welcome travelers into one's home and be kind to them. Abraham ran to meet the visitors and bowed low.

“Do not go on, but stay here,” Abraham said. “Please rest under the tree. I will bring you some food. Then you may go on.” The three visitors agreed.

Abraham brought water for his visitors to wash their feet. Then Abraham told his wife to knead some dough and bake bread while he prepared meat for his visitors. He chose a calf and had a servant prepare and cook it. When everything was ready, Abraham brought the food to his visitors. He stood by them while they ate.

As they were eating, one of them asked, “Where is Sarah?” Abraham replied that she was in the tent. The visitor then said, “Your wife Sarah will have a son.”

When Sarah heard this she laughed. She and Abraham were old. The thought of such old people having children was amusing.

The visitor turned to Abraham and asked, “Why did Sarah laugh and think she was too old to have a child? Doesn’t she know that nothing is too hard for the Lord?”

When they had eaten, the travelers started off again on their trip. They were heading toward Sodom. Abraham walked with them a little way. By this time he knew that they were not men but spiritual beings. He had given his best hospitality to visitors from heaven.

One of the visitors was speaking for the Lord. “Shall I tell Abraham what I am going to do?” he asked his companions. “All the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. I know that he will teach his children and everyone in his household to keep my ways and do what is right.”

Turning to Abraham, he said, “The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah is crying out for punishment. I will visit Sodom and Gomorrah to see whether these cities are as evil as they seem.”

Abraham wondered what would happen to his nephew Lot if these cities were destroyed. Because Abraham loved Lot he asked, “Will you destroy the good people along with the evil people in Sodom?” The Lord said, “If I can find fifty good people in Sodom, I will not destroy it.”

Abraham was afraid that there might be fewer than fifty, so he pleaded with the Lord: “Would you save the city if there were only forty-five good people?” The Lord answered, “If I find forty-five good people, I will not destroy it.”

Still Abraham felt troubled. There might not be even forty-five good people. He asked, “What if you find only forty good people?” The Lord said, “I will not destroy the city if there are forty good people in it.”

Abraham worried that there might be fewer than forty. “O Lord, don’t be angry with me, but if there are only thirty good people, will you spare the city?” The Lord promised not to destroy the entire city if only thirty good people could be found. Abraham kept pleading until the Lord promised not to destroy the city if only ten good people lived there. Then Abraham returned to his tent.

## **The Angels and Lot**

Genesis 19

It was evening when the angels reached Sodom. Soon the city gates would close. Lot was one of the wise men who sat at the city gates and solved the problems people brought to them. When Lot saw two strangers approaching, he greeted them with a low bow and invited them to his house for the night. At first, the

strangers refused. They would spend the night in the streets. Because Lot knew the desires of the men in the city, he insisted that the strangers come home with him. Finally they did.

Like Abraham, Lot practiced hospitality. Lot prepared food for them to eat. Soon the news spread over the city that Lot had two visitors. From all parts of the city, men young and old hurried to Lot's house, wanting to harm the strangers. Lot offered his daughter instead, but the men only wanted the strangers. When they tried to break open the door to Lot's house, the angels pulled Lot inside and caused the men of Sodom to become blind.

The angels told Lot, "Sodom is so evil that God is going to destroy it. You must get out of Sodom. Tell your daughters and their husbands to get out too."

Lot went to the homes of his sons-in-law, who were men of Sodom. He told them, "We must get out of Sodom, for the Lord is going to destroy it." But they did not believe him.

Before the sun rose, the angels urged Lot, "Take your wife and two daughters and run for your lives." Lot didn't want to leave his home in such a hurry. But God had good plans for Lot and his family. The angels forced him and his family to leave the city.

Once they were outside the city, the angels said, "Run to the mountains for your lives. Do not even stop long enough to look back."

When the sun came up, fire and brimstone fell like rain from the sky upon Sodom and Gomorrah, destroying the cities and everybody who lived in them. In her heart, Lot's wife missed Sodom, and she looked back at the city. When she did, she turned into a pillar of salt. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed so completely that no one even knows where the cities were.

Lot and his daughters no longer had a home. They went to live in a cave in the hills to the east. In the hills of what is now Jordan, two sons were born, Moab and Ammon, descendants the family who worshipped the one God and hosted heavenly visitors.

## **Abimelech and Sarah**

Genesis 20

Afterwards, Abraham traveled south and spent time in Gerar, between Kadesh and Shur. Again Abraham told Sarah to say she was his sister. Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent for Sarah and took her for himself. But God came to Abimelech in a dream at night and told him that she was a married woman.

Abimelech had not touched Sarah, so he answered God, "Lord, will you slay a righteous nation? He said she was his sister and she said he was her brother. I acted from the integrity of my heart and my hands are innocent."

God replied that He had been watching over Abimelech. "Give Sarah back to Abraham," God said. "He is a prophet. He shall pray for you and you will live."

Early in the morning, Abimelech got up, called his servants to him and told them what happened. He called Abraham and asked why he had done this.

Abraham answered, "Because I thought the people here did not fear God, I thought they would kill me in order to get my wife. Indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother. When God caused me to leave my father's house I asked her to tell people and I am her brother."

Abimelech gave Abraham animals and servants, returned Sarah to him, and invited him to live in his land wherever he wished. He told Sarah he gave Abraham a thousand pieces of silver for her protection.

No children had been born in Abimelech's household while Sarah was there, and Abraham prayed to God for them and they had children.

## **Isaac and Ishmael**

Genesis 21:1-13

Afterwards, God visited Sarah, as He had said He would. He kept His promise to Sarah, and she gave birth to a son a year after the angels' visit. Abraham called his son Isaac. Abraham was one hundred years old when Isaac was born. When Isaac was eight days old Abraham circumcised him.

Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and everyone who hears about this will laugh too. Who would have thought that Sarah could give Abraham a son in his old age?"

The child grew, and Abraham celebrated with a great feast.

One day Sarah saw Ishmael making fun of Isaac, and she asked Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. She did not want Ishmael to share anything that belonged to Isaac.

Abraham was sad at this request, because Ishmael was his son. But God said to Abraham, "Don't be sorry on account of the boy and the servant. Listen to Sarah, for Isaac's descendants will be your true lineage. Still I will make a great nation out of Ishmael, because he is your son."

Years before, if Abraham had offered the animals in the proper way, he would have set the example of faith that God was seeking. However, because of Abraham's mistake in offering the animals, his descendants would have to leave Canaan, and it would be many years before they could return.

## **The Angel and Hagar**

Genesis 21:14-21

Abraham got up early in the morning, took bread and a bottle of water, and gave them to Hagar. Then he sent Hagar and Ishmael away. They headed south into the wilderness. When the water was gone, Hagar placed her son in the shade of a bush and sat down a little ways away. Not wanting to watch her son die, she turned her back to him and began to cry.

God heard Ishmael's voice and an angel called to Hagar: "What is wrong, Hagar? Don't be afraid. God has heard the voice of the child. Rise up, lift him up and take him by the hand, because I will make him a great nation."

God opened her eyes and Hagar saw a well of water. She filled the bottle with water and gave some to Ishmael to drink.

God was with Ishmael. He grew up living in the wilderness of Paran and became an archer. His mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

## Abimelech and Abraham

Genesis 21:22-34

Abraham's neighbor Abimelech and his captain Phichol came to Abraham and said, "God is with you in everything you do. Now swear by God that you will not deal falsely with me, my son or my grandson. Return the kindness that I have done to you."

Abraham promised, "I will swear."

Abraham said that Abimelech's servants had taken a well away from him, and Abimelech said he did not know about it.

Abraham gave Abimelech sheep, oxen and seven lambs, and they made a covenant together. Abimelech asked about the meaning of the seven lambs, and Abraham said they were a witness that he had dug the well. They called the place where they made the covenant Beersheba. Abraham planted a grove of trees and prayed to God there. Abraham lived in the land of the Philistines for many days.

## Abraham and Isaac

Genesis 22:1 - 19

Isaac was the child that God had promised to Abraham, and Abraham loved him as a gift from God. Abraham looked forward to the time when Isaac would become a man and have a family, fulfilling God's promise.

As Isaac grew, Abraham taught him to know and worship God. Perhaps he took Isaac with him when he made offerings. Abraham taught Isaac that God would accept the gifts and hear the prayers of people who did what was right and trusted in God.

One day God called Abraham and said to him, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love so much, and give him back to me as an offering. I will show you where to build the altar."

Abraham did not know why God asked him to do this. God had promised to make a great nation from Isaac's family line. How could God keep His promise if Abraham had to offer Isaac on an altar? Abraham did not understand, but he trusted that God knew best.

Abraham got up early in the morning, put a saddle on his donkey and tied on it the wood for burning the offering. With Isaac and two servants, Abraham started out. On the third day, God showed Abraham Mount Moriah [Jerusalem] and told him that was where he should make the offering. Abraham told his servants, "Stay here with the donkey, while Isaac and I go to worship God."

Abraham gave the wood to Isaac to carry, and he took the container of coals and the knife. Together they set out.

Isaac was old enough to help carry the wood and understand what was needed to make an offering. He said, "Father, we have the fire and the wood. Where is the lamb for the offering?"

"My son, God will provide a lamb," Abraham answered. Abraham trusted God, and Isaac trusted his father. They continued on their way.

When they came to Mount Moriah, Abraham built an altar, piled the wood on it, tied up his son Isaac, and laid him on top of the wood. Then Abraham took his knife and lifted up his hand. At that moment the angel of the Lord called to him out of heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham."

"Here am I," he answered.

"Don't put your hand on the boy. Don't do him any harm. Now I know that you fear God, since you have not kept back your son, your only son, from me."

Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in the bushes by its horns. Abraham took the animal, and he and Isaac offered it up to God. Abraham called the place Jehovah-jireh, meaning, "the Lord will provide."

Then God said to Abraham: "Because you have not kept back your son, your only son, from me, I will bless you and multiply your family line. They will be as many as the stars of heaven and the sand upon the seashore. In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

By trusting his father and helping him make the offering, Isaac showed the same faith as his father. Like Abel and Noah before them, they made offerings in faith. Both Abraham and Isaac became fathers of faith.

Abraham and Isaac went back to Beersheba. Abraham received news about his brother Nahor, whose wife Milcah bore him eight sons and whose concubine Reumah bore him four sons.

## **Abraham and the Men of Hebron**

Genesis 23

Sarah died in Hebron at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven. Abraham mourned for her. As a shepherd Abraham did not own any land. Now he asked his neighbors, the sons of Heth to sell him some land.

"You are a mighty prince among us," the men answered. "Choose the best of our sepulchers to bury your dead. None of us will hold back our sepulcher from you."

Abraham stood up, bowed down to the people of the land, and asked to buy the cave of Machpelah near Mamre from Ephron the son of Zohar.

Ephron, a Hittite living in the area, offered to give Abraham both the field and the cave in it. Abraham again stood, bowed down before all the people, and offered to buy the field. Ephron said it was worth 400 shekels of silver, and Abraham measured out the money.

A border was set around the field, the cave and all the trees in the field, marking Abraham's possession in the presence of the children of Heth. Abraham buried Sarah in the cave.

## **Isaac and Rebekah**

Genesis 24 - 25:18

Abraham also was getting very old, and he did not want Isaac to marry one of the girls who lived around them. Abraham called his oldest servant, Eliezer, the one who was in charge of his household, and asked him to go to Haran and look for a wife for Isaac from among Abraham's relatives.

Eliezer took ten of his master's camels, loaded them with gifts, and traveled back to Haran, where Abraham had come from. It was evening when he arrived, and the women came out of the city to get water

from the well. Eliezer had his camels kneel down by the well, and he prayed, “Lord, God of my master Abraham, help me today out of kindness to my master Abraham. The women of the city are coming to get water. Let the young woman I shall ask to give me a drink offer to get water for my camels. Then I will know that she is the one you have chosen to be Isaac’s wife.”

While he was still praying, a beautiful young woman came to get water. After she had filled her pitcher from the well, Eliezer said, “Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher.”

“Please drink, sir,” she answered. She set down her pitcher and gave him a drink. Then she said, “I will get water for your camels, too.”

She quickly emptied her pitcher into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water. She kept doing this until all the thirsty camels had had enough to drink. When the animals were done drinking, Eliezer gave Rebekah a golden earring and two gold bracelets and asked, “Whose daughter are you? Is there room in your father’s house for us to stay?”

She answered, “I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Nahor. We have plenty of room and supplies for your camels.”

Eliezer bowed his head and prayed: “Thank you, Lord God of my master Abraham. Thank you for being so kind and true to him and for leading me to his relatives’ house.”

Rebekah ran home to tell her family. Her brother Laban saw the gifts and heard Rebekah’s report. He hurried to the well and said to Eliezer: “Come in. We have a room prepared for you and a place prepared for the camels.”

Eliezer came to the house, unloaded the camels, and gave them straw and food. After he and his servants had washed their feet, food was set out for him to eat. But the old man said, “I will not eat until I have told you why I have come.”

“Tell it to us,” they said.

“I am Abraham’s servant,” he introduced himself. “The Lord blessed my master with large flocks and herds. Sarah, my master’s wife, had a son when she was old. My master made me promise to go to his relatives and find a wife for his son.” Eliezer told them how he prayed for God to guide him, and how Rebekah came and answered that prayer.

Bethuel and Laban answered, “The Lord has brought you here, so what can we say? You may take Rebekah with you to be Isaac’s wife, as the Lord said.”

When Eliezer heard these words, he bowed down and thanked God. Then he brought out presents of silver, gold and fine clothing as gifts for Rebekah. He also gave gifts to her brother and her mother.

Eliezer ate the feast that had been prepared and spent the night. In the morning he said, “Now let me go back to my master.” When they asked Rebekah if she was willing to go with Eliezer, she answered, “Yes, I will go.” Rebekah mounted a camel and followed Eliezer back to Canaan.

Isaac was living by the well Lahairoi, where the angel had met Hagar. At the end of the day, Isaac often walked alone out in the fields, thinking about God. One evening he saw a row of camels in the distance and ran to meet them.

“Who is that man coming to meet us?” Rebekah asked Eliezer.

“That is my master, Isaac,” Eliezer answered.

At once Rebekah got down from her camel and covered her face with a cloth. In those times, the man did not see his fiancée’s face until after they were married.

Eliezer reported to Isaac how God had answered his prayer and sent Rebekah to him. Isaac took her to the tent that had been his mother’s, and she became his wife. He loved her, and she comforted him in the loss of his mother.

## **Abraham and Keturah**

Genesis 25

Abraham took another wife. Her name was Keturah, and she gave birth to six sons: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. While he was still living, Abraham gave everything he had to Isaac. To Keturah’s sons, Abraham gave gifts and sent them away to the east.

Abraham died peacefully at the age of one hundred and seventy five. His sons Ishmael and Isaac together buried him in the cave in Hebron with Sarah.

After Abraham’s death, God blessed Isaac, and Isaac continued living by the well Lahairoi.

Ishmael had twelve sons: Nebajoth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadar, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. These were also the names of their towns and their castles. Each of the twelve became a prince of a nation, the descendants of the woman who was visited twice by an angel and spared from death in the wilderness.

Ishmael lived to be one hundred and thirty seven years old. He lived in Havilah near Shur, in the area where Abraham and his family lived during Ishmael’s childhood. Ishmael died in the presence of all his brothers.

## **Rebekah and Her Sons**

Genesis 25:19-34

Isaac was forty years old when Rebekah became his wife. They lived together for twenty years, but no child was born to them. Isaac prayed to God on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The Lord heard his prayer, and Rebekah became pregnant.

Rebekah felt two babies struggling with each other inside her, and she prayed to the Lord, seeking to understand why this was happening. God told her, “Two nations are inside you, and two kinds of people will come from you, one stronger than the other. The older brother will serve the younger brother.”

When the children were born, the first baby was covered with red hair. They called him Esau. Then his twin brother was born, coming out holding onto Esau’s heel. They called him Jacob.

Esau and Jacob grew up. Although they were twins, they were very different in nature. Esau was a clever hunter and loved to spend time out in the fields. Jacob, on the other hand, was a quiet person and stayed around the tents. Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating the meat that Esau found and cooked for him. Rebekah loved Jacob.

One day Jacob was cooking some stew when Esau returned home tired out from hunting. He said to Jacob, "Feed me, please, some of that red stuff. I'm about to faint."

"Sell me your birthright," Jacob replied, thinking quickly. In those times, the oldest son in the family received the birthright. This meant that when his father died, he got twice as much of his family's wealth as any of his brothers. It also meant that his family would respect his opinion and accept his leadership.

"I'm about to die!" Esau answered. "What use is a birthright to me?"

"Swear today that the birthright is mine," Jacob insisted.

Esau agreed. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and the lentil stew. Esau ate, drank, got up and went away. He didn't care about the birthright. He didn't think about the future; he just thought about how to get what he wanted now.

## Isaac and His Neighbors

Genesis 26

There was a famine in the land, as in the time of Abraham. Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar. The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go to Egypt to live. Stay in this land, and I will be with you. I will bless you and give this land to you and your descendants. I will fulfill the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will make your seed multiply like the stars of heaven. I will give these countries to your descendants and in them all the nations of the earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my commandments."

So Isaac lived in Gerar.

The men of the place asked about his wife, and he told them she was his sister. Because she was so beautiful, he was afraid that if they knew he was her husband they would kill him.

When they had been there a long time, one day Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out a window and saw Isaac enjoying the company of his wife. He called Isaac and said, "She must be your wife; why did you say she was your sister?"

Isaac answered that he was afraid he would be killed because of her.

Abimelech said, "What have you done to us? One of my people might have taken her and you would have made us all guilty? Abimelech gave orders to all his people not to touch Isaac or his wife.

Isaac planted crops in the fields, and the harvest was a hundred times greater than what was planted. God blessed him and he became great. He had many flocks and herds and servants, and the Philistines envied him. They filled with earth all the wells that Abraham had dug. Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, because you are much greater than we are."

So Isaac left and went to live in the valley of Gerar. There he opened up the wells that Abraham had dug and the Philistines had filled up, and he called them by the same names that his father had given them.

Isaac's servants dug a well in the valley and found a spring of water. The herdsmen of Gerar fought with Isaac's herdsmen over the water. His servants dug another well, and the herdsmen fought over that one, too. He dug a third well, and there was no fighting over it. He called the third well Rehoboth, saying, "Now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in this land." Then he moved to Beersheba.

That night the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Don't be afraid, because I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your seed for my servant Abraham's sake." Isaac built an altar there and pitched his tent. His servants also dug a well there.

Then Abimelech went to see him, taking with him his friend Ahuzzah and Phichol, the captain of his army.

"Why do you come to me," Isaac asked, "since you hate me and sent me away from you?"

They answered, "We saw that the Lord is with you. Let us swear an oath and make a covenant between us that you will not hurt us as we have not hurt you. We have done nothing but good to you and have sent you away in peace. Now you are blessed by the Lord."

Isaac made a feast for them and gave them food and drink. In the morning they made solemn promises to each other, and Abimelech and his people left in peace.

That same day Isaac's servants came to him and told him that they had found water in the well they had dug. He called the well Shebah, and the city is called Beersheba.

When Esau was forty years old, he married two Hittite women. This brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah.

## Isaac and His Sons

Genesis 27:1 - 28:9

Isaac called Esau to him one day and said, "Now I am old, and I do not know when I will die. Please take your bow and arrow and go out to the field and kill a deer. Fix me my favorite food and bring it to me to eat. I want to give you the blessing before I die." Esau went out hunting.

When a father was about to die, he gave his blessing, or his spiritual legacy, to his son. Rebekah heard what Isaac said to Esau. She remembered that God had told her that the older son would serve the younger one. Eve had betrayed father and son (God and Adam) when she fell. In Eve's place, Rebekah wanted to make sure that a father and son fulfilled God's will.

Rebekah told Jacob that Isaac was planning to give the blessing. "Go out to the flock and get me two young goats," Rebekah told Jacob. "I will prepare the meat the way your father likes it. Then you can take it to your father and give it to him to eat, so he can bless you."

Isaac was blind, and he depended on his hearing, touch, smell and taste to know what was going on. "Esau is hairy and my skin is smooth," Jacob objected. "My father will feel my skin." Rebekah prepared the meat, put Esau's clothes on Jacob, and tied goatskins onto his hands and neck. Then she placed the meat and bread in Jacob's hands.

Jacob went to Isaac and said, "Here I am."

"Who are you?" his father asked.

"I am Esau, your first son. I have done what you told me. Get up now and eat the meat, so you can give me the blessing."

Isaac asked him to come closer so he could feel him. Jacob went up to him, and Isaac felt him. "The voice is Jacob's, but the hands are Esau's," Isaac said. He ate what Jacob had brought. Isaac asked his son to

kiss him. Esau's clothes, which Jacob was wearing, smelled of the outdoors. "The smell of my son is like the smell of the field which the Lord has blessed," Isaac said.

Then Isaac blessed Jacob with the blessings of heaven and earth. He told him that he would have power over his brothers and over nations. He called upon God to be a friend to all of Jacob's friends and an enemy to all of his enemies.

When Isaac finished giving the blessing, Jacob left. Just then, Esau came back from hunting with the meat he had prepared. "Here I am with the meat, Father," Esau came in and said. "Sit up and eat it, so you can bless me."

"Who are you?" Isaac asked.

"I am your first-born son, Esau," he answered.

Isaac began to shake. "Where is the one who brought me the meat which I ate before you came? I blessed him, and the blessing cannot be taken away."

When Esau heard these words, he began to cry bitterly: "Bless me too, oh my father."

"Your brother came and tricked me," Isaac said. "He carried away your blessing."

"Don't you have one blessing left for me?" Esau cried.

Isaac answered: "You will live by the fruit of the earth and the dew of heaven. You will live by the sword. You will serve your brother for some time and eventually break out of his yoke."

Esau hated his brother Jacob because his father had given him the blessing. In his heart he said, "My father will soon be dead, and then I will kill Jacob."

Someone told Rebekah what Esau was thinking. She called Jacob and told him, "Your brother Esau comforts himself by planning to kill you. Go visit my brother Laban in Haran. Stay there until your brother's anger goes away and he forgets what you have done. Then I will send for you."

Rebekah told Isaac, "The Hittite girls make my life weary. If Jacob takes one of them for a wife, what good will that do me?"

Isaac called Jacob, blessed him, and told him, "Do not take a wife from the women of Canaan. Go to the house of your mother's father and take a wife from that household. May God bless you, make you fruitful and multiply your descendants. May He give the blessing of Abraham to you and your seed, and may you inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham."

When Esau learned that Isaac told Jacob not to take a wife from the women of Canaan, he went to Ishmael and took Mahalath, one of his daughters, as a wife.

Jacob obtained the blessing, but he would have to work hard for twenty years to make the promises come true.

## God and Jacob

Genesis 28:10-22

Jacob left his home in Beersheba and headed north towards Haran. It was a lonely trip. When the sun set, he found a stone to use for a pillow and he lay down to sleep. While he slept he had a dream. In his dream he

saw a stairway reaching from earth to heaven, and angels were going up and down the stairway. At the top stood the Lord.

“I am the Lord God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. I will give to you and your descendants the land you are lying on. Your seed shall be like the dust of the earth, spreading out to the west and the east, to the north and the south. In you and in your seed shall all of the families of the earth be blessed.” God also promised to be with Jacob and protect him wherever he went. “I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I carry out these words.”

Jacob woke up and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I didn’t know it. This is the house of God. This is the gate of heaven.” Early in the morning, Jacob got up and took the stone that he had used for a pillow and set it up as a pillar. He poured oil on it and called the place Bethel, meaning the house of God.

He made a promise: “If God will be with me and protect me, if he gives me food to eat and clothes to wear, and if I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. This stone which I have made into a pillar shall be God’s house, and I will give back to God one tenth of everything I have.”

## **Jacob and His Wives**

Genesis 29:1 - 31:16

Jacob continued traveling. He came to a well in Syria with three flocks of sheep around it, and he asked the shepherds where they were from. When they answered Haran, he asked if they knew Laban. They did, and they said that Laban’s daughter Rachel was bringing sheep to the well.

The well was covered with a large stone. Jacob saw his opportunity and rolled the stone away from the well and watered his uncle’s sheep. Then Jacob greeted Rachel with tears. He told Rachel that he was the son of Rebekah, her aunt. Rachel ran back and told her father.

When Laban heard the news, he hurried to meet his nephew, embraced him, and brought him to his house. “You are my flesh and bone,” he told Jacob. Jacob stayed there for a month, and then Laban asked him: “You are my relative; what wages do you want for serving me?”

Laban had two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Leah’s eyes had no sparkle in them, but Rachel was beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel and said, “I will serve you for seven years in return for Rachel, your younger daughter.”

“It’s better for her to marry you than another man,” Laban answered. “Stay here with me.”

For seven years Jacob worked as a servant so he could marry Rachel, and they seemed like just a few days to him, because he loved her so much.

When the seven years were over, Jacob reminded Laban of his promise. Laban held a wedding feast and invited the people from around the area. During the wedding feast, the bride’s face was covered. That night, Laban sent Leah, instead of Rachel, to Jacob’s tent. In the morning, Jacob realized that he had married Leah instead of Rachel. “What have you done to me?” he asked his uncle. “Didn’t we agree that I would serve you in return for Rachel? Why did you trick me?”

“In our country,” Laban answered, “the younger daughter cannot get married before the older one.” Laban knew that Jacob understood the importance of the position of the first-born child. Then Laban added, “If you serve me for seven more years, you can have Rachel too.”

Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. God had pity on Leah, who was not favored by her husband, and she gave birth to four children, Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah.

Then Jacob's family life became complicated. Rachel, who had no children, was jealous of Leah. Rachel thought that if her servant had children, she could claim them as her own. So Rachel gave Jacob her servant, Bilhah, as a concubine, and she had two sons, Dan and Naphtali. Then Leah gave Jacob her servant, Zilpah, as a concubine, and she also had two sons: Gad and Asher. Leah eventually gave birth to two more sons, Issachar and Zebulun, and a daughter, Dinah. Eventually, God answered Rachel's prayers, and she gave birth to a son, Joseph. Years later, Rachel would have one more child, a son named Benjamin. From these twelve sons of Jacob would come the twelve tribes of Israel.

When Joseph was born, Jacob talked to Laban about returning to his home country. Through all these years, he never forgot his family. He wanted to go back and make peace with his brother Esau. However, Laban did not want to let his son-in-law go. Since Jacob came to live with him, Laban's flocks and herds had multiplied. Laban realized that God had been blessing him because of Jacob. He asked Jacob what wages he wanted for staying on to work for him.

Jacob agreed to continue working for Laban in return for all the spotted goats and dark-colored sheep in his flocks. Jacob had a plan that resulted in many spotted and dark-colored animals being born. Soon there were lots of them, and they were healthier and stronger than the light-colored animals. Laban was not pleased. He tricked Jacob and changed his wages ten times. Still, Jacob's flocks kept growing.

After six years God said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your father, and I will be with you." Jacob called Rachel and Leah to come out to the field with him. He said to them, "Your father's attitude toward me has changed, but the God of my father has been with me. You know how hard I have worked for your father. He tricked me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not let him harm me." Then he announced: "In a dream God told me to leave this country and return to the land where I was born." Rachel and Leah said that they were willing to go with their husband.

## **Jacob and Laban**

Genesis 31:17 - 55

One day while Laban was away shearing his sheep, Jacob put his children and his wives on camels, gathered all his flocks and his belongings, and started out for Canaan. Rachel stole her father's household gods and took them with her.

Jacob didn't tell Laban that he was leaving, and Laban didn't learn about it until three days later. Taking several relatives with him, Laban traveled quickly for seven days and caught up with Jacob's family at a mountain.

That night God appeared to Laban in a dream and warned him: "Be careful what you say to Jacob."

The next morning Laban told his son-in-law: "What have you done? You sneaked away from me. You carried my daughters off like prisoners captured in a battle. Why didn't you tell me you were going, so we could have a goodbye party? Why didn't you let me kiss my grandchildren goodbye? I understand that you want to go back to your childhood home, but why have you stolen my household gods? I could hurt you, but the God of your father spoke to me last night and told me to be careful what I do."

“I left like this because I was afraid you would take your daughters away from me,” Jacob answered. “If you find a single thing we have stolen from you, I will give it back.” (He did not know that Rachel had taken the household gods.)

Laban searched all the tents. Rachel had stuffed the idols into her saddlebag and was sitting on them. “Forgive me for not getting up,” she told her father. “I’m bleeding.”

For many years Jacob had worked for his uncle without complaining. Now he got angry: “You came chasing me as if I were a criminal. Twenty years I have been with you. I took care of your ewes and nanny goats, and they gave birth to healthy young animals. I never ate one of your rams. When any of your animals were attacked and carried off by wild beasts, I took the loss. You made me pay for every animal that was stolen, day or night. You changed my wages ten times. But God has seen how much I suffered, and that is why He appeared to you last night.”

Laban thought things over and looked around at his daughters and grandchildren. He had a change of heart. Finally he said, “Let’s agree to be at peace.”

Jacob and his men made a pile of stones as a record of their agreement. Then Jacob and Laban ate a meal together. “May God watch over us as we separate,” Laban said. Laban kissed his daughters and grandchildren and blessed them. Then he returned home.

## The Angel and Jacob

Genesis 32

Jacob continued on his journey, and the angels of God came to meet him. When Jacob saw them he said, “This is the host of God.” Then Jacob sent messengers with greetings for Esau, who was living in the land of Seir in the area of Edom, south of Canaan. “Tell Esau that his servant Jacob has been living with Laban and is coming back with many oxen, donkeys, flocks and servants. He hopes you will welcome him.” The messengers returned with the news that Esau was coming to meet him and bringing along four hundred armed men.

Jacob became upset and afraid. He was bringing a family, not a war party. Jacob divided the people and animals into two groups, hoping that if Esau attacked one group, the other would be able to escape.

Then Jacob prayed, “Oh God of my grandfather Abraham and my father Isaac, you told me to return to my country and my relatives. I left home alone, crossing the river with just my staff for support, and now I am returning with two bands of people. O Lord, deliver me from my brother Esau. You promised to multiply my descendants like the sands of the sea.”

That night Jacob prepared gifts of animals for his brother. The gifts included two hundred nanny goats and twenty billy goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milking camels with their young ones, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys with ten foals. He put servants in charge of each group of animals and told them to take the animals to Esau and give him this message when he met him: “These animals are a present from your servant Jacob for his master Esau. He is coming right behind us.” He told them to keep space between each group of animals and for each servant to give the same message.

He took his two wives, two concubines and eleven sons and passed over the ford of Jabbok, near the Jordan River. He sent everyone else ahead, while he stayed behind alone.

That night an angel came and wrestled with Jacob. They fought until dawn. When the angel saw that he could not gain the victory over Jacob, he touched Jacob's hip and knocked it out of joint. "Let me go," the angel said. "The day is dawning."

"I will not let you go until you bless me," Jacob answered.

"What is your name?" the angel asked.

"Jacob," was the answer.

"You will no longer be called Jacob. Your name is now Israel: one who has power with God. You have struggled with God and with men, and you have won the victory."

Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

Jacob had spent twenty years serving an uncle who kept tricking him. He was returning home with a large family and many belongings. He had overcome the angel. He was ready to give everything to his brother Esau in order to make unity in heart.

## Jacob and Esau

Genesis 33:1-16

Jacob got up and went to meet Esau, walking with a limp. Jacob saw Esau coming towards him with four hundred men. Jacob divided his family into four groups. Then Jacob walked towards his brother, bowing to the ground seven times.

Esau ran to meet Jacob and hugged and kissed him. Both of them began to cry. Esau looked up at the women and children. "Who are the people with you?" he asked.

"These are the children whom God in His kindness has given to me," Jacob answered.

"What did all those groups of animals mean?" Esau asked.

"They are gifts for you," answered Jacob.

"My brother, I have enough animals," Esau replied. "Please keep what you have."

Jacob said, "No. Please accept them. To see your face is like seeing the face of God. I'm giving them to you because God has been kind to me. I have enough."

Jacob understood that the blessings he had received were meant to be offered up totally to his brother. Esau's heart was changed by Jacob's gift offensive and his humble, loving attitude. Thus, Jacob and Esau succeeded, reversing the failure of Cain and Abel.

Abraham and Isaac made an offering that God could accept, and Jacob and Esau overcame resentment and embraced. Jacob was able to love Esau, who had been like an enemy. Esau's heart was softened by the way Jacob served and loved him, and he was able to love Jacob.

## Jacob and His Neighbors

Genesis 33:17-34

Esau returned to Seir, and Jacob went nearby to Succoth, where he built a house and made booths for his cattle. Then he went to Shechem in the land of Canaan, where he put up a tent near the city, bought a field and built an altar.

Leah's daughter Dinah went to visit the women in the land. When Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite prince, saw Dinah he took her and slept with her. He loved her and asked his father to get Dinah for a wife. Jacob heard about it and waited for his sons to come back from the fields. The sons were very angry when they learned what happened.

Hamor went to see Jacob and said, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. I ask you to give her to him as a wife. Let us make marriages between us. You can give your daughters to us and we will give our daughters to you. You can live her with us and trade with us." Shechem said to them, "Let me find grace in your eyes, and I will do whatever you ask me to do.

The sons of Jacob answered deceitfully and said, "We cannot give our sister to someone who is uncircumcised. If all your males are circumcised, we will give our daughters to you and take your daughters to us."

Their words pleased Hamor and Shechem. They went back to their city and told the men, "These men are peaceable with us; let us let them dwell in the land and trade with us, because there is enough land for them. Let us take their daughters for our wives and give them our daughters for their wives. They make only one request as a condition for us to be one people: that every one of our males be circumcised as they are. Then their animals and belongings will be ours. Let us consent to this."

They agreed, and all the males were circumcised. On the third day, when the men were sore, Dinah's brothers, Simeon and Levi, took their swords, went boldly into the city and killed all the males. They took Dinah, the men's animals, belongings, and all their wives and children with them.

Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me and made me stink among the people who live in this land. We are few in number; they will gather against us and destroy me and my house." His second and third sons answered, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?"

## **God Blesses Jacob**

Genesis 35-36

God told Jacob to go to Bethel, the place where he first met God when he was running from Esau. Jacob told his family to first put away their idols, wash themselves, and dress in clean clothes. Then he buried their household gods under a tree near Shechem. As they traveled south, the people in the cities around them were afraid of God and did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

They arrived in Bethel and built an altar. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse died, and they buried her there.

There God spoke to Jacob and called him Israel. God repeated the blessings He had promised twenty years earlier: "I am God almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation shall come out of you. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you and your descendants." Jacob set up a pillar and made an offering to God.

They continued traveling south. Rachel died near Bethlehem while giving birth to Jacob's twelfth son, Benjamin. She was buried at Bethlehem.

Jacob continued traveling and pitched his tent near Edar. There Reuben went into the tent of Bilhah, Jacob's concubine, and Jacob heard about it.

Finally Jacob reached the home of his father Isaac in Hebron. When Isaac died, at the age of one hundred and eighty, his sons Esau and Jacob buried him in the cave in Hebron with Abraham and Sarah.

Five sons were born to Esau and his wives when he lived in Canaan: Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jaalam and Korah. Esau, in whom Jacob saw the face of God, took his three wives and children and his animals and belongings and went to live in Edom near the mountain of Seir, because their animals were too numerous for the brothers to live near each other. Kings descended from Esau reigned in Edom before there were kings in Israel.

Jacob's children and grandchildren would go to Egypt, where they would go through many difficulties before returning to Canaan. On their way back to Canaan, Jacob's descendants would encounter the extended family of Abraham as they passed through the lands inhabited by the descendants of Ishmael, Esau and Lot.

## Joseph and His Family

Genesis 37

Of all his twelve sons, Jacob had a special fondness for Joseph, Rachel's oldest son. When Jacob gave Joseph a colorful coat, his older brothers hated him. Seeing that their father loved Joseph the most, the brothers were so angry that they could hardly speak to Joseph.

One day when he was seventeen years old, Joseph saw four of his brothers doing something wrong. Quickly he could he told his father what they had done. The brothers hated Joseph for telling on them.

Joseph had a dream, and he told his brothers about it: "We were together in the field tying stalks of grain together into sheaves. My sheaf stood straight up, while yours bowed down around it." This made the brothers very angry. "Do you think you will rule over us some day?" they asked. They hated him even more.

Then Joseph had another dream, which he also told to his brothers: "I dreamed that the sun and the moon and the eleven stars bowed down to me." His father became upset: "What are you are dreaming about? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow down to you?"

Joseph's brothers were jealous, but his father remembered the dream and wondered what it could mean.

Jacob lived with his family in Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac had lived. Jacob's flocks were so large that there was not always enough grass for them to eat nearby. Sometimes the brothers had to go far from home to find pasture. Jacob sent his ten oldest sons to north Shechem to search for food and water for the cattle and sheep. After some time, Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers and their flocks and see how they were getting along. When Jacob arrived in Shechem he learned that his brothers had gone farther north to Dothan, so he went there.

While Joseph was still a long ways off, the brothers saw a young man coming towards them wearing a beautiful coat. They recognized Joseph and began to talk among themselves, planning how to get rid of him: "Here comes that dreamer!" they said. "Come let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns. We can say that a wild animal ate him. Then we will see what becomes of his dreams."

Reuben, Jacob's oldest son, heard the conversation. He didn't want to harm Joseph. "Let us not kill him," he said to his brothers. "Let's just put him in this pit." Reuben planned to rescue Joseph as soon as the others

were away, but he left for a while. When Joseph arrived, his brothers tore off his coat and threw him into a pit. Joseph cried and begged them to let him out. Paying no attention to Joseph's shouts, the brothers sat down to eat.

While Reuben was still away, the other brothers saw a caravan of Ishmaelite merchants on their way to Egypt to sell spices.

Judah, the fourth son of Jacob, said to his brothers. "What would we gain if we kill our brother and hide his blood? It would be better to sell him to these people than to let him die in the pit. After all, he is our brother." The others agreed.

When the caravan arrived, the brothers lifted Joseph out of the pit and sold him for twenty pieces of silver. The descendants of Ishmael took Joseph to Egypt with them.

After selling Joseph, the brothers returned to their work. When Reuben came back he bent over the pit and called out to Joseph. There was no answer. Again and again he called Joseph's name. Reuben ran to his brothers and said, "The child is gone. What shall I do?" As the oldest son, Reuben felt responsible for his brothers.

The others told Reuben what they had done. "But what shall we tell our father about Joseph?" they wondered. Finally they decided to kill a young goat and dip Joseph's coat in its blood. They would take the bloody coat to their father and tell him that they had found it.

Jacob was very upset when his sons returned without Joseph. "We found this coat," they told him. "Does it belong to your son?" Jacob recognized Joseph's coat, and he believed that wild animals had killed his son. Jacob tore his clothes and dressed in coarse sackcloth. People often did this as an expression of mourning. Jacob cried and cried for many days. His children tried to comfort him, but Jacob said, "I will go to my grave crying for my son."

## **Tamar and Her Father-in-Law**

Genesis 38

Judah met a Canaanite woman named Shuah and married her. They had three sons. Judah chose a woman named Tamar to be the wife of his first son. However, this son was an evil person in God's eyes, and God killed him. Judah told his second son to take Tamar as his wife, to carry on the oldest brother's lineage. This was a custom at the time, but the second son did not want to father children who would carry on his brother's lineage, so God killed him too.

The third son was still young, and Judah sent Tamar back to her relatives. As the years passed Tamar realized that her father-in-law would not ask his third son to marry her. Judah had no other descendants. Tamar understood the importance of God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that through their seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. She decided to take a great risk to make sure that Judah's lineage could continue.

When Tamar heard that Judah went away to shear sheep in Timnath, she dressed herself as a prostitute and put up a tent close to where Judah was going to be. Judah did not recognize his daughter-in-law and entered her tent. Judah had no money with him to pay her, so Tamar asked to keep his ring, his bracelets and his staff until she was paid.

Later, when Judah sent servants with money, the tent was gone.

Some months later, word reached Judah that his daughter-in-law was pregnant. If a widowed or unmarried woman became pregnant, it was the custom to put her to death. When Tamar was brought to Judah, she held out the ring, bracelets and staff and announced that the father of the child was their owner.

Judah realized what had happened, and he admitted, “She is more righteous than I am, because I didn’t give her my third son to be her husband.”

Tamar was expecting twins. When it was time to give birth, one baby stuck out his hand, and the midwife tied a red thread around it, so they would know which was born first. Then the baby pulled back his hand, and his brother came out first. The first-born was named Pharez and the second-born Zarah.

Ever since Adam’s family, Satan had a special claim upon first sons. God wanted to restore the position of first son to His side and reclaim the birthright for heaven. In Isaac’s family, Jacob gained the birthright from his older brother Esau when they were grown men. Now, in Judah’s family, Pharez won the birthright for God’s side even before he was born. One of Pharez’ descendants was king David, from whose royal lineage Jesus’ was born.

## Joseph and Potiphar

Genesis 39: 1 - 20

After a long journey through dry and rocky lands, Joseph and the merchants arrived in Egypt. The Egyptians spoke a different language and worshipped many gods. They built large cities, beautiful temples and mighty pyramids by the great river Nile. Life in Egypt was very different from life in the tents of Canaan.

Joseph was sold to Potiphar, the captain of the guard for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.

God did not forget Joseph, even though he was now a slave in a strange land. God was with Joseph, and everything he did went well. Even Potiphar realized that God was with his servant, and after a while he put Joseph in charge of his household and his business. Joseph was a slave, but his master trusted him very much and gave him a big responsibility.

Potiphar’s wife tried to take Joseph to be with her, but he refused. He told her that he would do nothing that would hurt his master or to hurt God. One day when Joseph was alone in the house with Potiphar’s wife, she grabbed his clothes. Joseph turned and quickly ran out of the house.

Angry because Joseph rejected her, the woman decided to cause trouble for him. She called out to the other men and told them that Joseph had tried to rape her. She held up his clothes as proof. When Potiphar came home, she told him the same story. Potiphar believed his wife and had Joseph thrown into Pharaoh’s prison.

## Joseph and the Prisoners

Genesis 39:21 - 40:23

What happened to Joseph must have seemed terribly unfair. To be a slave was bad enough, but to be put in prison for doing what was right was even worse. However, Joseph did not complain or feel sorry for himself.

The head of the prison watched Joseph and realized that he was good at taking care of people and that he could be trusted. He put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners. Even in prison, God was still with Joseph, and everything Joseph did turned out well.

Pharaoh became angry with two of his officials: the man who brought his drinks to him and his chief baker. He had both of them put in prison. The captain of the guard asked Joseph to take care of them.

One morning Joseph noticed that they were upset. “Why are you troubled?” he asked them.

“We have had strange dreams,” they told Joseph, “and there is no one here to tell us what they mean.” In the palace, there were wise men who could explain the meaning of dreams.

“Surely God knows the meaning of your dreams,” Joseph said, “and I am His servant. Tell me what happened in your dreams, and maybe God will show me what they mean.”

The chief butler spoke first. It had been his job to bring the king’s drink to him. “In my dream,” he said, “I saw a vine with three branches on it. The branches budded, formed blossoms and produced ripe grapes. I pressed the juice of the grapes into Pharaoh’s cup and put the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.”

Joseph explained the dream: “The three branches are three days. In three days, Pharaoh will return you to your position, and you will bring Pharaoh’s cup to him again.” Joseph asked the chief butler to remember him and tell Pharaoh about him when he returned to the palace. The chief butler promised to do that.

Next the chief baker told Joseph his dream: “There were three white baskets on my head. In the top basket were all kinds of baked things for Pharaoh, but the birds came and ate the food in the top basket.” Sadly, Joseph explained the meaning of his dream: “The three baskets are three days. In three days the Pharaoh will have you hanged.”

Three days later Pharaoh held a great birthday feast. During the feast he summoned the prisoners to the palace. He returned the chief butler to his former job, and he had the chief baker hanged. The chief butler, however, soon forgot about Joseph.

## **Joseph and the Pharaoh**

Genesis 41

Two years later, Pharaoh had two strange dreams. In the morning, he woke up very troubled and called for the wise men in Egypt. He told them his dreams, but no one could explain them.

Then the chief butler remembered Joseph’s kindness. He told Pharaoh about the young man in prison who could explain the meaning of dreams. Pharaoh immediately called for Joseph. Joseph must have been surprised at such a sudden call. After shaving and changing his clothes he quickly went to the palace.

“I have had a dream,” Pharaoh told Joseph, “and no one here can explain it. I have heard that you can explain dreams.”

“That wisdom does not belong to me,” Joseph answered humbly, “but to the God I serve. God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.”

Then Pharaoh described the dream: “I was standing upon the bank of the river when seven nice, fat cows came up out of the river and ate in the green grass. Then seven other cows came up after them. They were the skinniest-looking cows ever seen in Egypt. The seven thin cows ate up the seven fat cows, but they

looked as skinny as before. Then I woke up. Afterwards I fell asleep and dreamed again. I saw seven heads of grain growing on one stalk. They were full, good heads. Then seven more heads sprang up, but they were thin and dried up, blasted by the east wind. The thin heads of grain ate up the good ones.”

Joseph told Pharaoh: “Both dreams have the same meaning. God wants to show you what is going to happen. The seven fat cows and seven full heads of grain mean seven years. The seven thin cows and the seven thin heads of grain also mean seven years. There will be seven years of abundant harvests in Egypt. Afterwards will come seven years when no plants will grow. All the food will be gone, and people will become so hungry that they will forget the good years. God has given you these two dreams to show you that these things will happen soon. You should choose a wise man and put him in charge of all the food in Egypt. During the seven years of abundant harvests, let him save enough each year to last through the years of famine.”

Pharaoh and his servants listened carefully to what Joseph said. “Surely the spirit of God is in this man,” Pharaoh said to his servants. To Joseph he said, “God has showed these things to you. No one is wiser than you. You shall be in charge of my house and be responsible for all my people. Only I will be greater than you. I will put you in charge of all the land of Egypt.”

Pharaoh took the ring off his hand and placed it on Joseph’s finger. He dressed him in royal robes and put a gold chain around his neck. He gave him a chariot to ride in and servants to run ahead and order the people to bow down to him. He also gave Joseph an Egyptian wife, the daughter of a priest.

Joseph was thirty years old. All these honors did not change his heart. He was still kind and fair to everyone. Every day he traveled around the country and gathered up the extra food and put it in storage.

During this time God blessed Joseph with two sons. He called his first son Manasseh and his second son Ephraim.

When the seven years of plenty had passed, the land became dry. Grain did not grow anywhere in Egypt. When people needed food, they came to Joseph. He opened the storehouses that had been filled during the years of great harvests and sold the food to the Egyptians. Not only the Egyptians were hungry, but also people from other countries. From far and near, people came to Joseph, begging him to sell them grain so they would not die of hunger.

## **Joseph and the Food Supplies**

Genesis 42

The hunger spread to the land of Canaan. There was little food, and people worried about finding something to eat. Jacob said to his sons, “Why do you look at each other? I have heard that there is corn in Egypt. Go down there and buy food for us so we don’t die.”

Ten brothers left for Egypt. Benjamin did not go with them. Since he had lost Joseph, Jacob loved his son Benjamin best. Jacob was so afraid that something bad would also happen to Benjamin that he would not let his youngest son go far away from home. More than twenty years had passed since the brothers had sold Joseph. Now they too were going to Egypt.

The fields in Egypt were just as bare as the fields in Canaan. The grain was kept in great storehouses. Like everyone who wanted to buy food, the brothers went to see the official in charge. Little did they dream that this person dressed like an Egyptian prince who sat on the throne was their brother. In these twenty years he had become a man. Everyone bowed to him as if he were a king.

Joseph recognized his brothers at once. When they bowed down, he remembered his dreams. Joseph missed his family. He wanted to know whether his brothers had changed. He pretended not to know them and spoke to them in the Egyptian language. “Where are you from?” he asked.

“We have come from the land of Canaan to buy food,” they answered.

“You are spies,” he argued. “You came to see how much our country is suffering, so you can come back and fight us.”

“No, my lord,” they answered humbly. “We are your servants, coming to buy food. We are all sons of one man. We are not spies.” Joseph still insisted they were spies. “We are a family of twelve brothers, the sons of one man in Canaan,” they answered. “The youngest is at home with our father.”

Joseph wondered whether they were kind to Benjamin. He wondered whether they cared any more about their father’s happiness now than they did when they sold him to the Ishmaelites. Joseph resolved to find out more before he told them who he was. “You must prove that you are not spies,” he declared. “I will put nine of you in prison and send one back to Canaan. If he returns with your youngest brother, then I will believe that you are telling the truth.”

Joseph had all the brothers put in prison for three days. Then he sent for them and said, “I respect God, and I want to do the right thing. I will send nine of you back home with food, but I will keep one of you here in prison. The next time you come, you must bring your younger brother along. If you don’t, I will know that you are spies.”

The brothers began to think about Joseph. They said to each other, “We are suffering now because of our sin. Now we know how afraid and upset Joseph was when we sold him. He begged us not to sell him, but we would not listen. That’s why this terrible thing is happening to us.”

Reuben, the oldest brother and the one who had planned to save Joseph’s life, told them, “Didn’t I tell you then not to sin against the boy? You would not listen to me. By your sin you brought this trouble on all of us.”

They did not know that Joseph understood what they were saying, because he always spoke to them through a translator. Joseph’s heart was touched. They were sorry for their wrongdoing. Joseph turned his face away and wept. Then he dried his tears and acted like an Egyptian prince again.

Joseph took Simeon, the second oldest brother, and had him tied up and returned to prison. Then he ordered his servants to fill the brothers’ sacks with grain and put each man’s money back into his sack.

With heavy hearts the brothers started home. What would their father say? That night, one of them opened his sack of grain to feed the donkeys and found his bag of money on top of the food. They were even more afraid when they saw the money. “What is this that God has done to us?” they asked each other.

When they reached home they told their father what had happened. As they emptied their sacks, each of them found his money inside. Both they and their father were afraid.

Jacob said, "Joseph is gone, Simeon is gone, and you want to take Benjamin away. Everything is against me." Reuben said, "If I don't return to you with Benjamin you may kill my two sons." But Jacob said, "My son shall not go down with you. His brother is dead, and only he remains. If mischief happens to him along the way, you will send me in sorrow with my gray hairs to the grave."

## Benjamin and His Brothers

Genesis 43 - 44

The terrible hunger continued in Canaan. When the grain they had brought from Egypt was all eaten up, Jacob said to his sons, "Go again and buy us a little food." Judah reminded him, "The man told us we would never see his face again unless our younger brother was with us."

"Why did you tell the man you had another brother?" Jacob asked bitterly. "He asked us directly whether our father was alive and whether we had another brother," Jacob's sons answered. "We only answered his questions."

The days dragged on, and each day there was less to eat. Finally Judah said, "Father, if you do not send us soon, we will all die of hunger. I will take good care of Benjamin. If any harm comes to him, you can blame me forever."

At last their father let Benjamin go with his brothers. Jacob told them to take presents and carry twice as much money as before. Sadly he said, "If my children must all be taken away from me, then I must bear the loss."

When the brothers arrived in Egypt and Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he ordered his servants to take them to his house and prepare a feast for them. The brothers did not know why they were being taken away. They were afraid. "He thinks we stole the money," they said to each other. "Now he will make us his slaves."

The brothers spoke to the man in charge of Joseph's house and told him that they had found their money inside their sacks of corn. "The God of your father gave you that as a treasure," the steward answered. Then he had Simeon released from prison and brought him to the brothers. He told the brothers that they were all invited to eat dinner with the prince.

At noon Joseph returned. They gave him the presents and bowed to him. Joseph spoke to them kindly and asked, "Is your father well?" Next Joseph turned to Benjamin and asked, "Is this the youngest brother you told me about?" He heart ached for his younger brother, and he longed to throw his arms around Benjamin, but there was still more he wanted to find out. He walked away from his brothers and went to his own room, where he wept in private.

When the tables were arranged, Joseph and his brothers entered the dining hall. One table was for Joseph, another for the Egyptians, and the third for Joseph's brothers. The brothers were assigned seats according to their ages, from the oldest to the youngest. They were amazed. Joseph sent them food from his table. Joseph told his steward to fill the men's sacks with grain and put their money in the top of the sacks. He also ordered that his silver cup be put in the top of Benjamin's sack.

The next morning, the brothers set out at dawn. Before they had gone far, Joseph told his steward, "Go, follow those men, and ask them why they took my silver cup." The steward found them and repeated Joseph's question. Upset, the brothers answered, "We returned the money we found in the tops of our sacks

after our last visit. Why should we steal something from your master's house? If you find the cup in the sack of any one of us, let that person die, and the rest of us will become your servants."

The steward began searching all the brothers' sacks, beginning with the oldest. The cup was found in Benjamin's sack. The brothers were so upset that they began to tear their clothes. They re-packed all their animals and returned to the city, where Joseph was waiting for them. They fell to the ground before him.

"Why did you do such a thing?" Joseph asked in a harsh voice. Judah spoke for all the brothers. "Surely God is punishing us for our sin. We are all your servants."

"God would not want me to keep all of you," Joseph replied. "I will punish only the one in whose hand the cup was found. The rest of you may return in peace to your father." Joseph wondered if they would be willing to let Benjamin stay behind and suffer so they could escape.

Judah remembered his promise to bring Benjamin safely home or bear the blame forever. He stepped closer to Joseph. "Please don't be angry with me," he said to Joseph. Then he reported what their father said when he learned that they had to take Benjamin with them to Egypt if they wanted to buy more food: "My wife bore me two sons; one is gone, torn into pieces; if you take this one from me and any mischief happens to him, you shall send me and my gray hairs to the grave."

"If I go back to my father without Benjamin," Judah continued, "he will die, because his life is bound up with Benjamin's life. I promised my father that if anything happened to Benjamin, I would bear the blame forever. Please let me stay here as a servant in Benjamin's place and let him return."

To spare Joseph from being killed by his brothers, Judah had suggested selling him to the Ishmaelites. Now Judah was offering himself as a lifetime slave in Benjamin's place.

## Joseph and His Brothers

Genesis 45

At last Joseph knew that the hearts of his brothers had changed. Joseph began to cry. He ordered all the Egyptian servants to leave the room so the brothers could be alone.

"I am Joseph," he announced. "Is my father still alive?"

The brothers could not say a word. They were stunned and very afraid.

"Don't be angry with yourselves for selling me," Joseph told them. "God sent me here to preserve your family line and save your lives. The famine has lasted for two years and will continue for five more years. Bring all your families and all your belongings to Egypt."

Joseph told them to return to their father and tell him the news that God had made Joseph lord over all Egypt, inviting him to come to Egypt without delay. "I will take care of you for the remaining five years of famine," he reassured them.

Joseph hugged Benjamin, kissed him and cried. Benjamin also cried. Then he embraced each of his brothers and cried with them. Finally his brothers talked to him.

Word reached Pharaoh that Joseph's brothers had come, and he was pleased. He sent Joseph a message telling him to invite his father and his entire household to move to Egypt.

The brothers started home, taking with them new clothing and various presents, along with wagons carrying supplies for their trip. When they reached Canaan, the brothers told their father the news: "Joseph is alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt."

At first Jacob's heart could not receive the news. When he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent, Jacob said, "Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."

## Joseph Welcomes Jacob

Genesis 46

Jacob and all his family set out for Egypt. They stopped in Beersheba to offer sacrifices. God spoke to Jacob in a night vision and called, "Jacob, Jacob."

Jacob answered, "Here am I."

God said, "I am God, the God of your father. Don't be afraid to go down into Egypt, because I will make a great nation of you there. I will go with you and I will surely bring you back again. Joseph will put his hand on you."

Jacob, the women and the small children rode in the wagons. Including Joseph and his two sons, there were seventy men and boys in Jacob's family at that time. He sent Judah ahead to meet Joseph, and they headed for the land of Goshen, near the sea.

Joseph rode in a chariot to meet his father. They embraced and cried for a long time. Jacob said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face while you are still alive."

Joseph told his brothers, "I will go to Pharaoh and tell him you have come with your cattle and flocks. When Pharaoh calls you and asks what your occupation is you shall say, 'Your servants' trade has been with cattle ever since our youth, as it was with our fathers.' Then you will be able to live in the land of Goshen, because shepherds are an abomination to the Egyptians."

## Jacob Blesses Pharaoh

Genesis 47:1-11

Joseph told Pharaoh that his father and brothers had come with their herds and flocks and were staying in Goshen. He took along with him five of his brothers, and Pharaoh asked them, "What is your occupation?"

The brothers answered, "Your servants are shepherds, both we and our fathers. We have come to spend time in this land, because there is no pasture for our flocks and the famine is terrible. Therefore, we ask you to let your servants live in the land of Goshen."

Pharaoh told Joseph to give his family the best land and let them live in Goshen. He asked him to choose the most capable men to take care of Pharaoh's cattle.

Then Joseph brought Jacob to Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

"How old are you?" Pharaoh asked.

"Jacob answered, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and I have not lived as many years as my ancestors." Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out.

## Joseph Governs Egypt

Genesis 47:12-31

Joseph settled his father and his brothers in the best land and gave food for them and their families.

The severe famine continued in Egypt and Canaan, and Joseph sold grain and brought the funds to Pharaoh's court. When people had no more money to buy grain, Joseph told them to bring their cattle and exchange it for grain. When they had no more animals to sell, Joseph bought their land and gave them grain to eat. He moved the people into the cities, except for the priests, who ate food from Pharaoh's warehouses and did not need to sell their land for food.

At planting time Joseph gave the people seed to plant, with the condition that they gave Pharaoh one fifth of the harvest. The people were grateful to be alive and promised to serve Pharaoh.

Jacob's family lived in the land of Goshen; their numbers multiplied and their possessions increased.

Jacob lived for seventeen years in Egypt. When death was near he called Joseph to him and made him swear not to bury him in Egypt. "I will lie with my fathers," Jacob said, "and you will carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place."

"I will do what you have said," Joseph answered.

Joseph vowed to keep his promise.

## Jacob Blesses His Sons

Genesis 48-49

Joseph received word that Jacob was about to die, and he brought his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to visit Jacob. When Jacob heard that Joseph was coming, he gathered strength and sat up on his bed.

Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Bethel and blessed me. He said, 'I will make you fruitful and multiply you and make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to you and your descendants forever. Your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in Egypt before I came, are mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. Any children born after them are yours.'" He talked about Joseph's mother, Rachel, who died at his side when they were on the way to Bethlehem, where he buried her.

Jacob's eyesight was dim, and he asked Joseph to bring his sons to him so he could see them and bless them. Joseph brought them to him, and Jacob kissed and embraced them. "Surely God has been good to me," said Jacob. "I never thought I would see your face, and now I see your sons." Joseph bowed down to his father, with his face to the earth.

Jacob placed his trembling hands on the boys' heads to bless them. He put his right hand on Ephraim, the younger child, and his left hand on Manasseh.

Jacob blessed Joseph: "May the God before whom my fathers walked, the God who fed me through my long life, the angel who redeemed me from all evil bless these boys. Let my name and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac be given them and may they grow into a multitude."

When Joseph saw that his father had laid his right hand on Ephraim, he lifted up his father's hand to move it to the head of Manasseh. "Not so, my father," he said gently. "This son was born first; put your right hand on his head."

Jacob refused. "I know. I know. He also shall become a great people, but his younger brother shall become greater than he. I will die, but God will be with you and bring you again into the land of your fathers. I have given you one portion more than your brothers."

Jacob called all his sons together and gave them blessings, commenting on their character and telling them what their future would be like.

Reuben, his first son, was strong and proud but unstable; because he took his father's place in bed with his concubine, he would not have the honor due a first son.

Simeon and Levi were violent and cruel men, killing others with the sword; therefore they would not inherit their own land but would be scattered through Israel.

Judah received high praise and was compared to a lion. From his lineage would come kings.

Zebulun would live by the seashore to the north, near Sidon. Issachar would use his strength to work the land.

Dan would be a judge and be like a serpent by the path, biting the heels of the horse to make its rider fall.

Gad would be raided and he would raid in turn.

Asher would have royal and dainty food.

Naphtali would be like a deer that gives birth to beautiful fawns.

Joseph would be a fruitful branch by a spring of water. He was attacked and harassed, but was a capable person and God helped him. God would bless him with the blessings of heaven, the heights and depths of the earth, and nurturing women.

Benjamin would be like a wolf eating its prey in the morning and sharing the catch in the evening.

Jacob told his sons to bury him with his fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre, in the land of Canaan. "There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah."

When Jacob finished giving instructions to his sons, he put his feet on the bed and died.

## **Joseph and the Promise**

Genesis 50

When Jacob died, Joseph ordered the doctors to embalm his father's body in preparation for burial. After the forty days of mourning that were customary in Egypt, Joseph went to Pharaoh and told him his father made him swear that he would bury him in the grave he had dug in the land of Canaan. "Now let me go there and bury my father," he said, "and I will come back again." And Pharaoh gave him permission to go.

Joseph, his brothers, Pharaoh's servants and officials, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, along with their chariots and horsemen, went to Canaan to bury Jacob. The family's little ones and the flocks and herds stayed behind. The host of people spent seven days mourning at Atad, beyond the Jordan River, and the inhabitants of Canaan marveled. Then Jacob's sons carried him into the land of Canaan and buried him at Hebron in the cave of Machpelah, along with Abraham, Isaac and Sarah.

When they returned, the brothers thought, "Maybe Joseph has been kind to us only for our father's sake. Now he may treat us cruelly to pay us back for what we did to him many years ago." They sent a messenger to Joseph, saying, "Before our father died, he told us to ask you to forgive us. Please forgive us, for we are servants of the God of our father."

Joseph cried when he heard this message. His brothers were afraid. He sent for them and said, "Do not be afraid. Am I in God's place that I should punish you? No! I will take care of you and your children for as long as I live."

At last the brothers' minds were at ease. Joseph's brothers had been his enemies, but Joseph forgave them and loved each of them with all his heart. The brothers were able to love Joseph and receive God's love through him. The realm of heart was expanded because God could connect with twelve brothers. From the twelve brothers would come twelve tribes, who would build a nation in the Promised Land.

Joseph lived to be one hundred and ten years old. When Joseph was about to die, he called the old men in the family to his bedside and said, "God will surely visit you and bring you out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." He made them promise that his bones would be taken to Canaan when their descendants returned in the future.

During the long years of enslavement, Jacob's descendants remembered God's promise that they would return to the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These were the three generations of faithful, obedient people who made offerings that God could accept. As carriers of the blessing they opened wide the doors of their tents, receiving visitors from heaven. These families struggled with blood relatives and in-laws, with masters and servants, and with neighbors, strangers and enemies to become the people of God.

## **Bible Study**

In the Biblical hall of fame (Hebrews 11), what made the following people exemplars of faith?

Abel -

Enoch -

Noah -

Abraham -

Sarah -

Isaac -

Jacob -

Joseph -

Review the accounts of the families of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in Genesis and give examples of how they handled challenges in the following family relationships:

Husband and wife -

Father and son -

Mother and son -

Father and daughter -

Brother and brother -

Brother and sister -

Uncle and nephew -

Father-in-law and son-in-law -

Master and servant -

Mistress and maid -

Describe the parallels between the courses of Abraham and Isaac (compare Genesis 14 and 26):

Blessings -

Disputes over wells -

Relationship with neighboring kings -

## **World Scripture Study**

See Chapter 1, “Traces of God’s Existence.”

According to the Jewish tradition, how did Abraham come to believe in one God?

According to the Qur’an, how did Abraham come to believe in one God?

What word does the Qur’an use to describe Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Ishmael? (Chapter 11, “The Succession of Founders and Messengers.”)

According to the Qur’an, how did Joseph resist the temptation by Potiphar’s wife and gain vindication? (Chapter 17, “Persecution and Martyrdom.”)

How is restoration described in the following religious traditions? (See World Scripture, Chapter 18, “Self-denial and No-self; Repentance, Confession, and Restitution.”)

Christianity -

Hinduism -

Taoism -

Look for examples of the role played by faith in the following religious traditions (See above.):

Jainism -

Confucianism –

Judaism -

Christianity -

Islam-

Buddhism -

# CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Tap into your divine gift of imagination ...

Portray the interaction of word and light in the creative process. (See Genesis 1 and John 1.) How do other pairs (such as words and melody in a song) interplay in creative works?

A part of Jewish tradition explains that God contracted part of God's self into vessels of light to create the world. These vessels shattered and their shards became sparks of light trapped within the material of creation. Prayer helps release these sparks and allows them to reunite with God's essence. Write a prayer, compose a song, make a drawing, or choreograph a dance that expresses this process.

Genesis 1 refers evening and morning being one day. What happens during the night that is different from what happens during the day?

There are various jokes about God making Eve out of Adam's rib. Write a new one.

There is a description of creation in Proverbs 8. How do you envision what this describes?

Portray the role that rest, or Sabbath, plays in your life

Think about how a first child who receives all the parents' love and attention and what happens when a second child is born. Write some diary entries the angel Lucifer might have made about his special relationship with God and how these feelings might have changed when Adam and Eve became the focus of God's love.

Suppose you were a good angel advising Eve at the same time as Lucifer was enticing her. What would you be telling her? (See, for example, the novel *Perelandra*, by C.S. Lewis.)

Where was Adam when all this was going on?

If Adam and Eve had not fallen, how might their life and their experiences parenting their children have been different?

Cain offered grains as a sacrifice and Abel offered animals; how might the views of God of a farmer differ from those of a herder.

Imagine a scenario in which they might cooperate in making their offerings.

What did the phrase “brother’s keeper” mean to Cain?

Write a want ad for a boat-builder.

Suppose Noah was hard of hearing or too busy doing other things to make a boat?

What if Noah misunderstood some part of God’s instructions?

What kind of difficulties might Noah have had in finding animals or getting them to enter the ark?

Do you suppose Mrs. Noah packed lunch for Noah each day?

What kinds of comments did the neighbors make about the family?

Suppose you were a television reporter covering the story of the ark for the evening news.

Whom would you interview?

What questions would you ask?

How often would you stop by the building site?

As the waters started to rise, what final report might you file?

Where would you be standing?

Suppose you were the weatherman for the local television station.

What comments would you make about Noah's project?

How would you answer questions from the public about an upcoming storm?

How did the animals feel about living in the ark?

Video some scenes of life inside the ark for the Fox Television Network.

Suppose you were Noah's wife and you kept a diary about your experiences:

What would it be like to have a husband who spent all his time building a boat?

What was it like to keep house in an ark?

What were dinner conversations like?

What kind of meals did you cook?

What did the sons and daughters-in-law do in the ark?

How did you get along with your daughters-in-law?

How did Noah's family feel about the ark once they started a new life?

Read traditional Jewish accounts about Abraham's boyhood (see [jewishencyclopedia.com](http://jewishencyclopedia.com) entries under "Abraham's birth and wanderings") and accounts in the Qur'an (look for 6:74-83, 19:41-50, 21:51-71, 26:70-

82, 37:83-98 and 2:258 and [quranexplorer.com](http://quranexplorer.com)). How do these accounts give clues about why Abraham had to leave home? Create some skits about these incidents.

Suppose you were Sarah:

How did you react when your husband told you God told him to head out for an unknown destination?

What did you take with you?

What kind of journal might you have kept about your travels with Abraham?

What souvenirs did you keep?

Why did you laugh when the angel said you would have a child in your old age?

If you knew the outcome of ongoing battles between your descendants and Hagar's descendants, how might you have handled the relationship with Hagar differently?

Genesis records two divine interventions in Hagar's life. What impact might this have had on her understanding of God?

The Hadith of Bukhari 4:55:583 (see [quranexplorer.com/hadith](http://quranexplorer.com/hadith)) is an account of the difficulties encountered by Hagar and a basis for events during the pilgrimage Muslims make to Mecca, the Hajj. Portray these events in a skit.

Suppose you were a real estate agent trying to sell Abraham some property.

What kind of land did Abraham need?

What was important to him?

What was important to his nephew Lot?

How did the Chamber of Commerce of Sodom portray their city in videos or brochures??

Suppose angels came to your hometown in search of righteous people.

How would they be received?

What criteria for righteousness would they use?

Draw yourself as a righteous person.

Interview Abraham and Sarah for a show entitled “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous.”

According to Genesis, Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac (chapter 22); Muslims understand that he was asked to sacrifice his son Ishmael (Look for 37:99-111 at [quranexplorer.com](http://quranexplorer.com)). What are some similarities and differences in these understandings?

Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scriptures all describe Abraham as a “friend of God”:

- "You, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend." (Isaiah 41:8)
- "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, and he was called the friend of God." (James 2:23)
- “For God did take Abraham for a friend.” (Look for 4:125 at [quranexplorer.com](http://quranexplorer.com))

Portray what it means to be a “friend of God.”

What did Isaac and Ishmael talk about after they buried Abraham?

Did they consider living near each other?

What was Isaac looking for in a wife that he might have included in a personals ad?

What was Rebekah looking for in a husband that she might have included in a personals ad?

What recipe for lentil stew would be so appealing that Esau would offer Jacob his birthright in return for it?

How did Rebekah prepare the goat meat for Isaac that gained the blessing for Jacob?

Create some episodes of a show entitled “The Young and the Restless,” starring Jacob and Esau.

Suppose you were a lawyer helping Isaac write up his will: What would your conversation be like?

Create a missing-person notice that Esau might have written about Jacob.

Draw the ladder that Jacob saw in his dream after leaving home. How did this experience shape his understanding of God?

Suppose Jacob could send letters back to Canaan:

Write a letter that Jacob might have sent to his mother.

What might she reply?

Create some scenes for a movie, “Close Encounters of the Third Kind,” starring Jacob.

Suppose Laban interviewed Jacob for a job taking care of his animals.

What questions would he ask Jacob?

What questions would Jacob ask him?

Suppose Jacob went to court to complain about how Laban was treating him.

What kinds of games did Jacob's 12 sons play?

How did Jacob's 2 wives and 2 concubines divide up the household chores?

What did the idols look like that Rachel brought with her on the trip?

What did Esau tell people when he was recruiting an army of 400 men to greet Jacob?

Choreograph the wrestling match between Jacob and the angel the night before he met Esau.

Jacob told Esau that to see his face was like "seeing the face of God." What kind of reaction did this comment get from Esau? Draw, paint, choreograph, or sculpt the meeting of the two brothers.

Suppose Jacob and Esau discussed the story of Cain and Abel making an offering and tried to decide if there was anything they can learn from it.

Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin. What might his childhood have been like?

Joseph had a “coat of many colors.” What do you think these colors were, and what did they mean?

What were the negotiations like between Joseph’s brothers and the Ishmaelites when they sold Joseph to them?

What obituary would Jacob have written about Joseph after he thought he was dead?

If Potiphar had caught his wife trying to seduce Joseph, what might their conversation have been like? How might history have turned out differently?

Write a plea from Amnesty International, calling for the release of Joseph from prison.

Joseph was delivered from prison because someone remembered a dream he interpreted for him. What other dreams might Joseph have interpreted for people?

How did the other members of Pharaoh's staff receive Joseph?

When he was young, Joseph had problems getting along with his brothers. What kind of lessons about getting along with people did Joseph learn as a slave and as a prisoner that might have helped him in his government position and his later relationship with his brothers?

Suppose you were Joseph's wife:

What did Joseph tell you about his childhood, how he came to Egypt, and the events that led to his rise to power?

What did he tell you about his God?

How would you respond to what he told you?

How would you welcome Joseph's large family when they arrived in Egypt?

Write a rap song about Joseph's life.

Suppose you were a feature writer for a Cairo newspaper:

What kind of story would you write about Joseph when he was appointed prime minister?

What update might you write after six years?

How might you revise your opinion after the first year of famine?

How would you describe the situation after 5 years?

Imagine that you were one of Joseph's brothers:

Describe your family life after Joseph was sold.

Tell your wife about what it was like going to Egypt to buy food.

What made Judah offer to stay in prison in place of his brother Benjamin?

What was Jacob thinking as the family traveled to Egypt? Did the trip seem long?

Draw, paint, or choreograph the reunion of Jacob and Joseph.

How did Jacob and his children get used to life in Egypt?

How did they picture the places such as Hebron and Shechem where they used to live?

How did Joseph's sons get along with their cousins?

Psalm 23 reflects David's understanding of God's role in his life. Use the style of a psalm, rap music, haiku, or another medium to portray how the following people might have expressed God's role in their life?

Adam

Eve

Cain

Abel

Noah

Mrs. Noah

The dove

Abraham

Sarah

Hagar

Ishmael

Isaac

Rebekah

Esau

Jacob

Laban

Leah

Rachel

Joseph

A brother of Joseph

Portray an experience you have had with God.

Write about how you have seen God in someone.