

January 1 : Scriptures Genesis 1-3

And we're off on our through the Bible reading venture!

SUMMARY

In this section, God creates the cosmos and our little slice of creation – the earth and all living things upon it. We have to read things a little out of order to get the full picture of chapters 1-2. God creates everything (2:4) by his Word (He simply speaks, and it's done!) and then creates the Man with his hands (2:7). He gives the Man the job of caring for and protecting the Garden (2:15) with the "law" that he does not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. While God proclaimed all He has made as good (1:25) there was one thing He pronounced as not good – for the Man to be alone. So, God creates the Woman from the Man's body (2:22). God gives them two more commands – to reproduce and rule the earth (1:28).

All would have been just dandy except an enemy appeared (who we find out later was the Adversary, Satan). The serpent sabotaged humanity's rule on earth by luring the Couple into breaking God's law by deciding for themselves what is right and wrong (3:4-5). To God, it is wrong to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Couple disagree and partake. BIG MISTAKE! It all goes downhill from there. The snake is cursed and God tells him his doom will come from the Woman's offspring sometime in the future (3:14-15). God tells the Woman her child-bearing process (3:16, remember the "reproduce" command?) will become more difficult and He tells the Man his rule over the earth will also become more difficult (3:17-19, remember the "take charge of the earth" command?). Out of mercy, the Lord clothes the Man and Woman (3:21), BUT they are no longer allowed to live in this special place with God and His physical presence. God banishes them from Eden and sent out into the untamed world under a death sentence (3:22-24). Talk about a wild ride of a beginning!

INSIGHT

Mankind was given the task of bringing an untamed God-created world under control and expanding their little dominion, Eden, over the face of the globe. God wanted them to be His vice-regents, who were to operate as His *image* as if God Himself were operating personally. This means the Couple had to do it His way only. Well, they decided *they* wanted to do it their way. And thus, the Fall. We find out later that this didn't surprise God. The plan to bring humanity back into the original relationship was already planned (Revelation 13:8). God's declaration in 3: set it in motion. God is so far ahead of humanity and His spiritual enemies, the future looks like the past. And He *will* succeed even though it will take time (Revelation 21:3).

January 2 : Scriptures Genesis 4-6

SUMMARY

Annnnd, the hits just keep on coming! In chapter 4, Adam and Eve start fulfilling God's "reproduce" command with the infamous Cain and famous Abel (4:1-2). Cain is a farmer and Abel is a rancher. A time comes when both guys want to bring an offering to God, no doubt thanking him for his provision (4:3). But while God accepts Abel's sacrifice, he denies Cain's offering (4:4-5). Cain becomes angry and God calls him out on it, warning him if he doesn't master himself, sin would master him (4:7). Cain doesn't listen and he commits the world's first murder (4:8). Cain's punishment is an extension of his father's punishment for sin. For Adam, making the earth produce food became more difficult. For Cain, the ground is not going to produce *at all!* Furthermore, Cain is banished even farther away from Eden (and thus God). He soon begins his own family (4:17-22). Lo and behold, his descendent is Lamech, who becomes another murderer (like father, like offspring) who this time kills out of vengeance (4:23-24). This just keeps getting better and better, doesn't it?

However, there is a bright spot! Adam and Eve have another son whose family line seems to be more what God is looking for (4:25-26). His line produces two awesome persons – Enoch (5:19) and Noah (5:28-29). Enoch lives God's way so well and so faithfully that God takes Enoch to be with Him (5:24). Then comes righteous Noah, which is a good thing, because the world is getting utterly wrecked through human sin and the corruption caused by divine beings (Sons of God, "Watchers" as they are called in other sources) that want to do what human beings alone were to do – make babies. The world composts into a terrible state with violence, bloodshed, and all sorts of nasty stuff. "The Lord saw that human wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time" (6:5). Get that? All evil, all the time! 24/7/365! God's solution? He will erase the evil ones and save the good ones (6:7). Sadly, the only good ones are Noah and his family, eight people in all. How do we know they're good? Because Noah did what God commanded (6:22). He builds the famous ark to preserve a small portion of humanity through a cataclysmic, world-cleansing flood. And here we stand at the beginning of a new beginning!

INSIGHT

Adam and Eve were told to rule the created world. They couldn't even rule themselves! Their legacy is seen in Cain. Even though he was warned about sin "crouching at his door" like an animal ready to spring into action, Cain surrenders to his base desire and murders his younger brother out of jealousy. We face the same choice as our ancestors. We can do things God's way or our way. Sadly, we often choose our way because it

gratifies our desires. Thank God that through Jesus' taking our punishment for sin, we can be forgiven and cleansed from sin (1 John 1:8-9). Furthermore, we have an indwelling Helper (the Holy Spirit) who assists us in following God's desires, not our own (Galatians 5:16).

January 3 : Scriptures Genesis 7-9

SUMMARY

In this section, the famous Flood comes in like, well, a flood. It's kind of cool how it happens. First, water shoots up from underground, then something seems to break in the atmosphere and even more water crashes down (6:11). But before it happens, God has Noah and the family get into the ark with all those critters. Wow! Can you imagine all the feeding and watering and shoveling...stuff? God shuts the ark crew in. So much water erupts and falls, mountaintops are covered and all terrestrial life outside of the ark is snuffed out (7:22). So much for the "all evil, all the time" people and the offspring of divine beings and humans, the giants (Nephilim). It only rains for forty days and nights, but the water surges on the earth for one hundred and fifty days.

The water finally subsides over the next one hundred and fifty days. The entire process of flooding, flushing, and receding takes about a year. (You're thinking about Noah and his family feeding, watering, and scooping... stuff... all that time, aren't you?) As the land begins to finally emerge Noah sends out some birds (a raven and a dove) for a terrestrial flood check to see if it's safe to disembark. When the raven and the dove don't return, that signals to Noah the earth is ready to support human life again (8:7-12). So, the whole bunch of them storm out of the ark and begin the same Adam and Eve process all over again – being fruitful and multiplying and filling the earth (8:17).

God makes a covenant with Noah to never again flood the earth in judgment – ever (8:21; 9:11, 15). (However, He didn't say anything about fire! Just sayin'.) After the covenant promise, God gives Noah an additional rule about not eating meat with the blood in it (9:4). Why? Life is in the blood and life belongs to God alone. God gives humanity the rainbow as a sign of his promise (9:12-16). But things don't end well. One of Noah's boys – Ham – sees his father in a drunken, unclothed state and tells his brothers (9:21-22). Noah curses Ham's son, Canaan, relegating his family line to servitude under his brothers. Then he blesses the other two sons, Shem and Japheth, for honoring him by covering him up. After a life span of 950 years, Noah dies.

INSIGHT

Genesis 8:1 says, God remembered Noah...". No, God didn't misplace the ark and its crew. This is a biblical way of saying the time had come for God to act according to His plan. We will see the same thing with the Israelite's enslavement in Egypt that God foretold to Abraham (Exodus 2:24). The time had come for God to plug the water sources and allow the water to settle into oceans so that Noah and his family could restart the

human race, a 2nd Genesis, so to speak. Maybe they could get it right? Don't get your hopes up!

January 4 : Scriptures Genesis 10-12

SUMMARY

Genealogies. Ummmmm...yeah. The bane of all new Bible readers. Strange names, strange places. Fine. Read them anyway. Why? You'll see many of these names pop up again throughout the Bible. As you become more acquainted with the Bible you'll discover really cool things in those "boring" lists! For now, put on your big boy/big girl pants and dive into the family lists (ch. 10). At the end of chapter 10, it says the people began to spread out according to God's command. However, contrary to that command, a very large group of people decide to clump together in the land of Shinar. That's modern-day Iraq near the ancient city of Babylon.

In chapter 11 this group tries to build a tower to reach God. Well, God isn't having any of that! So he divides their language into many. What? Yup. The text says they all spoke one language at first (11:1). By dividing their language and hampering their ability to communicate, God causes them to split up into groups that could understand one another. Ta-da! Problem solved. Pretty ingenious, right? The text then moves back to genealogy. (Sheesh, again?) But this is a *really* important family list. It starts with Noah's son, Shem, and goes down the line to Abraham. He is a *third* new beginning in God's plan! It seems Genesis ("In The Beginning") is all about new beginnings. It seems humanity can't get it together (first the Flood and then the Confusion). After the Babel fiasco, God decides he's going to build a family line of his own. It starts with Abram following his dad, Terah, from Ur of the Chaldeans (in the area of future Babylon) around the fertile crescent to the west toward Canaan (modern-day Israel). Terah puts down roots in Haran (a city in modern-day Syria).

God calls Abram and tells him to leave Haran and continue "to the land that I will show you" (12:1). If Abram trusts God and leaves everything behind, God promises to give Abram everything back as a reward for trusting Him. So, seventy-five-year-old Abram starts his journey with sixty-five-year-old Sarai and his nephew Lot and winds up in central Canaan (12:4-5). (Wait! Wasn't he supposed to leave his family behind? What's this nephew Lot thing?) A famine hits and Abram splits for Egypt because Egypt has this big Nile Delta that's great for growing food (12:10). He fears the Pharaoh might think his wife is a babe (which, evidently, she is!) and would kill to have her, so Abram and Sarai concoct a lie. Well, it doesn't work. Pharaoh takes her anyway and God punishes Egypt for Pharaoh doing so. Why? Because God intends to bring forth a child from Abram and Sarai. Pharaoh figures it out, gives Sarai back to Abram untouched, and tells them to git!

INSIGHT

The very things God tells Abram to give up – his country, his countrymen, and his family – are the very things God promises to give him – a land, a nation, a family. Isn't it interesting that the essence of faith (trusting God) often involves surrendering self-reliance and self-support to learn how to rely on God's support alone? *THIS* is a very difficult lesson to learn for God's people, but so very necessary.

January 5 : Scriptures Genesis 13-16

SUMMARY

Abram and Lot separate. In the words of the Ol' West, "This land ain't big enough for the two of us!" Lot moves east from the land of Canaan, down into the Jordan river valley which, at that time, sounds like it rivaled the original garden of Eden for its luxuriant vegetation (13:10). Not bad digs! Lot trots off leaving Abram alone. But not quite. God pops up again and promises Abram all the land he sees will be his along with countless descendants (13:14-17).

Well, Lot gets in a lot of trouble with his decision. It seems he's decided to relocate into a warzone. Kings with tough names living in the vicinity of the Dead Sea (Lot's grazing grounds) rebel against another king with a tough name (Chedorlaomar) from Elam (the area of modern-day Iran). King C with his entourage sweeps north, then west, then south into the land of Canaan following the Fertile Crescent to put the hurt on the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, and their fellow kings. Team Chedorlaomer trounce Team Sodom and Gomorrah, taking everything with them including Abram's nephew Lot. That doesn't sit well with Abram, so he rustles up 318 trained men from his household and tracks the retreating Team Chedorlaomer north (14:14). They catch up with them in what's known as the northern border of Israel today, engaged the enemy, and pursued the survivors as far as the Damascus area. Total beat-down! Abram heads south toward home and passes through Salem, where the king of Salem (Melchizedek – "King of Righteousness") comes out as a one-man welcoming committee and blesses Abram. Abram gives the king a tenth of the spoils and yet, turns down the reward from the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abram only wants God's blessing, not man's. So far, it seems to have worked out well for him.

Now comes an incredible even in Abram's life! God once again affirms His covenant with Abram – "You, old boy, *will* have a child! Not by adoption, but from your own body!" In fact, God promises Abram, his descendants will be countless as the stars! Abram believes God (15:6). That kind of trust is exactly what God is trying to establish in a faithless and distrusting humanity. God goes on to affirm His land grant to Abram (15:7). But Abram still has questions about how he will possess it. What happens next is breath-taking!

God has Abram set up a blood covenant ceremony. In a blood covenant ceremony, the two partners split animals in half, line the piece up, and then walk through the middle proclaiming their oath to fulfill their part of the covenant. But this is different. God puts Abra into a deep sleep, proclaims His promise to Abram, foretells how the land will become his through Abram's future offspring returning to the land after a long stay in

Egypt. What's unique is that God swears by Himself, meaning this oath is *unbreakable*. God *will* do it. And get this! God says Abram's land grant will stretch from the Nile in Egypt to the Euphrates (15:18)! Compare that to Israel today. God is going to do some *major* real estate shuffling in the future.

Well, as we all do upon occasion, Abram and Sarai try to help God out with His plans (16:2). Abram sleeps with Hagar (not Sarai) as a surrogate wife. Yes, that was an option in those days. But this creates a problem. Hagar, as the "productive wife" snubs Sarai because she has a kid, Ishmael, and Sarai doesn't. Sarai drives her away. God tells Hagar to return, drop the attitude, and submit to Sarai (16:9). But He also promises her a reward since Hagar has produced a son for Abram. Her future offspring will be too many to count as well, but they'll have a problem getting along with each other (16:10-12). For those of you who are keeping score at home, Abram is now eighty-six when Ishmael is born.

INSIGHT

Speaking of difficult lessons to learn, a big part of learning how to trust God and rely on Him is learning how to ignore our physical eyesight and *awesome* thinking abilities in favor of seeing life through God's eyes and walking forward according to spiritual "eyesight." This is the difference between Abram and Lot and the difference between a born-again Christian and a person who is not. For the born-again person, we are to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). This doesn't mean we ignore physical eyesight. It's a way of saying we should trust God about how to live our lives for Him more than relying on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6).

January 6 : Scriptures Genesis 17-19

SUMMARY

Okay, fast-forward 13 years. Abram is ninety-nine (17:1). That makes Sarai eighty-nine and Ishmael thirteen (duh!). God again confirms His covenant with Abram (17:2). Now He asks Abram to put some “skin in the game” by making a mark of the covenant upon his body – circumcision. This will serve as a constant reminder to Abram and his descendants of the covenant and their covenant partner. You know, just like the ring in a marriage ceremony. God also changes Abram’s name to Abraham and Sarai gets a name upgrade as well to Sarah (17:5, 15). God also reveals more about His covenant promises – God will make Abraham extremely wealthy and will bring a line of kings from his descendants. *God says this is a permanent covenant with Abraham and his offspring and the land is his permanent grant from God (17:7-8).*

After God affirms His great promises to Abraham, the old guy falls down laughing at the likelihood of a 100- year-old man having a baby with a 90-year-old wife. He suggests Ishmael as a viable option. After all, Ishmael is already a teen (again with the “trying to help God out” thing). But God says, No! He promised a son from Abraham and Sarah, not Abraham and Hagar, although God will bless Ishmael as well. Ishmael is not and never will be the “covenant son” to inherit his father’s covenant with God. Only Isaac is the covenant son. Abraham cooperates and has every male in his household circumcised. The covenant is secured!

Not long after that God shows up *in the flesh* with two divine beings with Him, also in the flesh (18:1). God sets the baby countdown clock going (18:10). Sarah laughs and God calls her on it. Here’s a tip: Even though God laughs at our plans (old Jewish proverb), don’t laugh at His. He’ll have the last laugh as we’ll see. God’s sidekicks then depart and head to the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah on a mission from God. God takes Abraham into His confidence about what’s in store for the two cesspool cities. Remarkably, God lets Abraham bargain Him down for the lives of those living there. God agrees to spare the cities if 10 righteous people live there. Why? Lot. In chapter 13 Lot and Abraham separated because their flocks were so large. Lot and his family make 6 people (Lot, wife, two daughters engaged to two guys). Surely there are just 4 more righteous people, right?

When God’s divine sidekicks enter the city, we find that Lot has gone from rancher to leader. He’s moved into a leadership role as “an elder in the gate” (19:1). That’s where the city’s leadership sat to keep an eye on things and render judgments. Well, S&G are about to be judged. Lot sees the angels and shows them true Middle East hospitality by bringing them home for supper. Meanwhile, a mob of wicked men gathers at the door to

rape the angelic beings (19:5). Yeah, things are getting intense! No sugar-coating it. Obviously, with just the 6 people of Lot's family unit, the save-the-city-population-number doesn't make the cut. The angels blind the mob and scoot Lot's family safely out of the area...except Lot's wife lags behind and gets turned into salt (19:26). Alone and devastated. Lot and his two daughters find refuge in a cave on the east side of the Jordan river valley (19:30). Believing to be the last remaining humans on earth, Lot's daughters come up with the brilliant plan of continuing humanity by having children with their father. Yuck. This is where the Ammonite and Moabite nations come from (19:37-38). As we go through the Bible, we'll discover that when people "try to help God out" it creates all sorts of problems, Ishmael, Ammon, and Moab for starters.

INSIGHT

Name changes in the Bible are *very* important. In the ancient world, as seen in the Bible, a person's name often reflects their nature and/or their destiny. This is why so many parents have great fun with baby-name books trying to pick out a fitting name for their precious new-born. The importance of names is also why "calling people names" can be so hurtful and can harm a person's future. A "bad name" is a false and pain-inflicting declaration about who someone is or what they are destined to be. But God likes changing names. A name change in the Bible often means a change of nature or future with God. Abram (*exalted father*) becomes Abraham (*father of many* – God changes him from an exalted man to an exalted *family* man). God changed Abraham's name as a prophetic declaration of what He would do. By the way, Jesus (Hebrew – *Yeshua*) means "salvation" for His very nature and destiny is to save all who would come from their sin and restore them to God! See how important names are?

January 7 : Scriptures Genesis 20-22

SUMMARY

Okay, back to Abraham! The now extremely wealthy tribal king relocates to the Negev, today's southern Israeli desert region. *Another* king, Abimelech (Not the one from Egypt. This one rules the town of Gerar near known today as the Gaza Strip), takes Sarah into his harem to become his wife. (Seriously, what is it about elderly Sarah that men fall all over her?) But God's plan to bring about a child through Abraham and Sarah is already in motion and He isn't going to let *anyone* mess it up. So basically, God threatens Abimelech with death. That gets the king's attention who pleads for his life based on "I didn't know and I haven't done anything!" God reassures Abimelech that He knows he's innocent and it's cool (20:6). "Just return Abraham's wife and it's all good. Otherwise, I'll smite thee," God tells him. Abimelech makes good on his word, scolds Abraham for deceiving him (20:9-10), and gives Abraham lots of animals and servants as restitution (20:14). Lo and behold, we find out God had stopped *every woman* in Abimelech's household from having babies. That's fascinating as it's God's insurance policy that a person wouldn't muck up His plan. (Remember the previous reading about people getting in the way of God's plans?)

Chapter 21 opens up with the big event! True to His word, God brings forth the covenant son (21:1-2)! And, to needle Sarah a little, Abraham names his son Isaac (21:3). It's a Hebrew word pun that means laughter (even the sense of *mocking laughter*). Not only did the couple laugh for joy, but it also points back to when Sarah laughed at God's word that she would bear a son. God gets the last laugh with Isaac (*laughter*). Abraham circumcises Isaac on the 8th day as commanded (21:4). A few years later when Isaac was weaned (a toddler), Sarah sees 13-year-old Ishmael teasing and mocking Isaac. See? Ishmael's lack-of-getting-along nature is already showing. So, it becomes time to have Hagar and Ishmael move out. Per God's command, there will be only one son to carry on Abraham's covenant line. This really pains Abraham, but God reassures him that He will look after them and bless them because Ishmael is, after all, Abraham's son (21:12-13). God also reassures Hagar when she finds herself alone in the desert with Ishmael as he's dying of thirst. God opens her eyes to see a water source and the two are saved (21:17-18).

By this time Abraham has grown so wealthy and powerful under God's blessing, Abimelech initiates a covenant with him to ensure mutual loyalty (21:23). Abraham agrees and he gives Abimelech a covenant sign, seven lambs. Whenever Abimelech sees the flock that will come from these lambs, he'll remember his covenant of loyalty with Abraham.

And now the big moment comes! God tests Abraham's trust and covenant loyalty to Him. God tells Abraham to sacrifice his covenant son, Isaac. Wait...what? How is God's permanent covenant with Abraham and his descendants going to continue past Abraham if Isaac is permanently dead? Abraham is faced with a harsh decision. Should Abraham not trust God and go with what he sees – a living Isaac – or trust God to do something miraculous through a dead Isaac? Against all human reason, Abraham demonstrates his *trust* in God and steps out to obey. Abraham and Isaac arrive at Mount Moriah (today's Temple Mount in Jerusalem) and Abraham prepares. He binds his son and lays him on the wood, and raises a knife to spill his blood in obedience to his covenant partner, God. *At the very last moment, at the point where Abraham has fully committed to obeying God, the Lord calls out to His faithful, trustworthy servant and tells him to immediately stop!* Not only does God know, but Abraham now knows he has reached the level of trust God has been looking for in humanity. God can now begin building a nation on a foundation of trust that Abraham will teach his descendants. Speaking of descendants, chapter 22 closes out with yet again another family list. Why? To establish a link between Abraham and Isaac to Isaac's future wife, Rebekah.

INSIGHT

Everybody likes to receive God's blessings, but few like surrendering to God what they have received. In Abraham's case, it was Isaac. For those who receive eternal life with God through Jesus, we are asked to live our lives for Him. We receive to give. God gives you a house. Are you ready to help a person in need of a place to stay? God gives you undeserved mercy. Will you swallow your pride and extend mercy to the person who doesn't deserve it? God does this to keep our eyes and reliance on Him and nothing else in this world. It's a challenge, but rewarding if you learn how to do it.