

Genesis

A Journey

Bible study is a gift, but it can also be a battle. A battle to make time, a battle to be undistracted, a battle to remain open to what God is saying about himself.

If you are new to Bible study, part of your battle may be to understand what's going on. Why is this language unfamiliar? Where are these strange-sounding, ancient middle-east cities? Who is speaking? Who is the intended audience?

If you have spent many years attending church, though, part of your battle as you study Genesis might be with familiarity. Have you heard, "Let there be light," hundreds...maybe thousands of times? Are you overly familiar with the story of Noah and the ark? Are you able to recite Abraham's family line from memory (and with song)?

The context notes will help combat both the familiar and the commonplace. Try to put yourself in the shoes of the original listeners...the group of Israelites who had been wandering the dessert, decade after decade, waiting to be a recognized people in a designated home. They were surrounded by nations who did not recognized a personal creator God. They were hearing these words and these stories

Creation

We begin our study in the beginning.

As you make your way through this week's reading and reflection questions, try to think of the creation account with fresh set of glasses.

Why is the idea of an intelligent Creator important?
What about a loving Creator? Or a creative Creator?
What is significant about a "day of rest"? How does poetry fit in to these passages?

Week 1, Day 1

Reading: Genesis 1:1-2

Questions

1. Take a moment to reflect. What, if anything, stands out to you in these two simple verses?

2. If God is creator, what does this mean for us as the "created" in regard to the authority we are under?

3. If you believe this account, compare how do you feel living in a world created by a creator, vs. living in a world created by chance?

4. What implications could this have for your daily decisions and attitudes?

Week 1, Day 3

Reading: Genesis 1:26-31

Questions

1. What characteristic does God bestow upon mankind upon creation in v. 26? (further developed in v. 28.)

3. How does this status/quality given to you by God make you feel about your role in the world? In your family? In your job?

4. How does the poem in v. 27 make you think or feel about God? What is one thing that stands out to you about His work in these verses?

Week 1, Day 4

Reading: Genesis 2:1-3

Questions

1. What are some of the things in the “vast array” of the heavens and the earth that you enjoy most? How does this turn your heart toward God (or not)?

2. The practice of “keeping the Sabbath holy” is not as cut and dry as it once was in our society. What do you think is the Lord’s intention behind the idea of setting aside a day for rest?

3. How do you do this (or wish you could do this in your own life)? What makes that difficult?

Week 1, Day 5

Reading: Genesis 2:4-14

Questions

1. Yesterday, we talked about the Godly goodness of rest. How does this passage highlight the Godly goodness of work?
2. How is Adam "paid" for his work?
3. Of course, these events take place back when the world was, literally, perfect. How do you feel right now about God's physical provision for you? In what ways do you struggle? What gives you hope?
4. How does God's command about "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" sound in this context? Gracious? Restrictive? Irrelevant?

Digging Deeper

Day 1

“Created” The Hebrew word for “create” here is the word “bara.” It is only used in the Bible when it is referring to divine activity. The author of Genesis is emphasizing the fact that the creation of the world by God differs intrinsically from anything man could create.

“Formless and Empty” This phrase contrasts sharply the phrase “heavens and earth.” God is speaking into the chaos and truly creating order and beauty out of nothingness.

“Hovering” in the English here is translated from a Hebrew word that means “fluttered lovingly”* -- as a mother bird would hover over her hatching chicks.

Day 2

“two great lights” Why is this important? The Israelites were surrounded by groups of pagan worshipers. This creation account highlights the fact that the sun and the moon (only referred to here as “lights”) were simply part of God’s good creation. The sun and the moon weren’t gods to be worshiped, but they “governed” the night and the day under His command.

Day 3

“image” -- “In the ancient world an image was believed to carry the essence of that which it represented.”** The surrounding Pagan cultures often used idols in their worship, but the Hebrew god created man to carry out His power and reflection. The expression “image of God” is used uniquely with reference to human beings and so sets them apart from the other creatures.” ***

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*Ellicot’s commentary for English readers.

**InterVarsity Press Bible Background Commentary

*** Genesis, A Commentary Waltke

Day 4

“because on it he rested” – In ancient near-east pagan religions, the gods were often attempting to find rest outside of their busy work or outside of the noisy clamor of humanity. The holy rest that God takes here is blessed and sacred.

Day 5

“work” – here we see that work is a gift, not a punishment. The Hebrew expression here that means work is only used elsewhere in this part of the Old Testament to refer to the activity of priests.

Leader Notes for Week 1

Setting the scene: Try to set the scene and emphasize the context for the nothingness that existed before God created the world and the power (simply by speaking words) God exhibited (as well as the creativity) in creation.

Creation: You will want to steer the conversation away from debates on the technical aspects of creation. There is a lot we don't know, and the Hebrew is open to (some) interpretation.

If the group (or one of the members) starts to head down a rabbit trail of technical aspects "how long was a day," etc., table that discussion for an outside time. This subject is debated by Bible-believing, God'-honoring scholars all over the world, and Godly men and women can arrive at different conclusions within the pale of orthodoxy.

Goals: Some goals as you lead the discussion this week would be to see the following conclusions come out of the discussion:

- The fact that God is the Creator and we are merely creatures is foundational. It is relevant to many issues in our lives, including: sanctity of life, obedience to God, and care for His creation.
- God's character. His creativity, benevolence, power, and ability/gift of rest are all highlighted in these chapters and should be a theme of the discussion.
- The fact that we are unlike God. This will probably come through in the application questions (we are the created rather than the creator, we struggle with taking a Sabbath, we struggle enjoy and respect creation, etc.).

The Break

Have you ever broken a beautiful, un-blemished object?
(A crystal glass, a snow globe...a bone?)

Now imagine living in a perfect place. A perfect garden.
In perfect harmony with every single living thing. And
breaking it.

How would you feel? Where would you go? What would
you do? Who would help?

Although the passages this week are very familiar, try to
put yourself in the garden...in the place of Eve...in the
place of Adam. See what the Lord has for you this week
as we walk through sorrow and redemption.

Week 2, Day 1

Reading: Genesis 3:1-6

Questions

1. The serpent is described as crafty. What is crafty about his question in v. 1? Can you think of an example in our society, or in your life, in which someone does (or has done) this?

2. Again, what is deceptive about the serpent's statement in v. 4 and 5? In what area of your life are you tempted to believe this kind of deceit?

3. Reread v. 6. In what way has Eve's attitude changed significantly between vv.2-3 and v.6. How can this be an instructive warning in your life today?

Week 2, Day 2

Reading: Genesis 3:7-11

Questions

1. Do you remember an experience when you or someone close to you (maybe a child), experienced a premature loss of innocence? How did that make you feel?

2. In what ways would you most enjoy life if we were back in the innocent, fully-protected days of the Garden of Eden?

3. In what ways does our shame cause us to "hide" or "cover ourselves" from the Lord. From others?

4. In what ways does our vulnerability make us afraid? Where does this hit you the hardest?

Week 2, Day 3

Reading: Genesis 3:11-13

Questions

1. Have you ever asked someone a question you already knew the answer to (like God does in v. 11)? Why do you think God does this?
2. How does the man (Adam) respond?
3. How does the woman (Eve) respond?
4. Why do you think blame-shifting is a practice we humans turn to so quickly?
5. What is so painful about accepting the blame ourselves?
6. Are you blaming someone in your life right now? Is someone blaming you?

Week 2, Day 4
Genesis 3:14-19

Questions

1. Whom does God curse first?
2. The word "for" in v. 16 can also be translated "against."
Does that change your view and understanding of this verse?
3. In what ways do you experience work and life to "produce thorns and thistles"? In what ways have we become accustomed to this difficulty?
4. In what areas might our society at large be in denial about this difficulty? How could this affect our policies, ideals, or attitudes?

Week 2, Day 5

Reading: Genesis 3:20-24

Questions

1. What kindness do you see in v. 21? How does this temporarily alleviate the shame of the man and the woman?
2. What act of violence must have taken place in order for the kindness to take place? How might this point to a future act of violence that was necessary in order for us to be "covered"?
3. How does it feel to know that, as a descendent of Adam and Eve, you have been banished?
4. What would a person have to get through in order to reach the Tree of Life in the garden? How has this been made possible? (Romans 5:12-21)

Digging Deeper

Day 1

Pattern – Keep in mind that for centuries these accounts were read aloud/retold orally. How was it possible to remember such long narratives? Patterns helped. In this passage we see that each “act” opens with a setting, concludes with a poem, and is followed by an epilogue.

Serpent – In the ancient Near East, the serpent was a symbol of both death and wisdom.

Day 2

Naked -- The Hebrew uses word play with the words “crafty” and “naked” – a similar phrase in English could be “shrewd and nude.” These words bookend the passage – again, another mnemonic device.

Day 3

Shame and Blameshifting – Take note this week of the times you experience shame or are tempted to blameshift. In those times, instead of trying to cover your shame yourself, go to the Lord in prayer and experience His grace and covering.

Day 4

Dust – In our modern society, we probably think of dust as a nuisance, but in ancient society, dust was a symbol of death and humiliation. This gives God’s curse to the serpent a little more emphasis.

Day 5

Garment -- God “gifts” Adam and Eve clothing made of skins. Gifts of clothing were significant in the ancient Near East, as clothing was relatively very expensive and contained much significance regarding status. So the ancient near-eastern listeners of this story would have perceived a gift of clothing as significant.

Sacrifice – Of course, this clothing also came at a price. Note the first sacrifice for sin here in Genesis 2.

Leader Notes

As you lead,

- Encourage your group members to put themselves in the shoes of both Adam and Eve and not just to think of Adam and Eve as weak, unfortunate characters. Adam and Eve are representative of every human. We are all weak, easily deceived blame-shifters. This is not someone else's problem. It is important that the participants in the study see themselves as fallible humans. Only then will they realize their need for God's grace.
- Try to dig into God's movement in this lesson. If He already knew what happened, why did He ask? He was moving toward Adam and Eve relationally, even as they were trying to move away from Him.
- Explore with the group the ways that we "cover." We obviously still cover with clothing, but in what damaging ways do we try to cover our shame? These might be areas to discuss: accumulating money or financial freedom, relying on career success, over-emphasizing appearance, controlling those around us, worrying, abusing substances...the list goes on.
- Take the group all the way to the cross. In order to "cover" their shame, God killed animals (a sacrifice) and used their death (the skins) to cover Adam and Eve. This points us, for the first time, to the fact that the penalty for sin is death and that sacrifice must be made to cover sin. Romans 5:12-21

God's Flood

You may be more accustomed to calling these passages, "Noah and the Ark," but this is really a story centered on God, on His judgement, and on His mercy.

Put yourself in the scene. You are in the desert...among a wicked people who have forgotten God...He tells you to build a ship...you pick up a hammer.

Although an ark full of animals may seem cute, this is not really a children's story. Death and destruction are huge themes. But so is the promise of redemption.

Week 3, Day 1

Genesis 5

Questions

1. What is the overall feel you get from a repetitive passage like this?
2. Does anything stand out to you in this genealogy?
3. Hebrews 11:5 says, "By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found because God had taken him away. Does this tap into any fears, desires, or longings for you?
4. Reread verses 28 and 29. We see here that the effects of the curse are still present. How are you currently experiencing weariness and "painful toil" in your life? To what or whom do you look for comfort?

Week 3, Day 2
Genesis 6:9-7:5

Questions

1. Think about the context here. Noah's homeland is desert-like: dry and arid. God has just asked to him to build an outrageously large ship that will take him over 100 years and all of his resources and time to build. According to v. 6:22 and 7:5, what was Noah's response? What do you think your response would have been?

2. Substitute your name for Noah's name in vv. 6:22 and 7:5. How does that make you feel? What if you substitute Jesus's name?

Week 3, Day 3

Genesis 7:6-23

Questions

1. In v. 7, we see that Noah and his family "went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood." Have you ever truly needed to "escape" from something or someone? From what or whom is Noah escaping?

2. What do you think Noah was thinking (or his family members were thinking) during the seven days that they were shut in the ark but the floodwaters had not yet come. Have you ever felt like you were waiting on God in a way that felt foolish to you or seemed foolish to others?

3. How does the second half of v. 16 make you feel? Is there an area of your life right now where you need to pray for the Lord to "shut you in"?

4. How do you feel about the utter destruction that is implied by v. 23: "Only Noah was left, and those with him on the ark."?

Week 3, Day 4
Genesis 7:24-8:19

Questions

1. What words come to mind as you picture the events of verse 8:1? Do you feel like God "remembers" you? Have you ever felt forgotten by God?

2. Chapters seven and eight, particularly vv. 8:3-14, describe a lot of time spent waiting...in an ark full of animals. Are you currently waiting on the Lord's timing for something in your own life? In what way are you surrounded by an ark full of animals? In what ways is it difficult to wait? Easy?

3. According to verse 8:20, what was the response of Noah to God's care for him?

Week 3, Day 5
Genesis 8:20-9:17

Questions

1. What is Noah's first act upon exiting the ark?
2. According to v. 8:21, did God make a covenant with Noah because of Noah's righteousness?
3. Even though God has made clear the truth of humankind's proclivity for evil in v. 8:21, what else does v. 9:7 show us about God's view of humankind?
4. We often associate the word rainbow with something cheery – like a cake decoration or décor for a child's bedroom. In the Hebrew, this word is literally just "bow," as in a weapon used in war. How does this definition affect the way we view vv. 9:12-16?
5. What feelings does verse 9:17 evoke for you?

Digging Deeper

Day 1

Genealogy Genealogies can seem boring at first glance, but look for little treasures. Reading them aloud helps. Derek Kidner comments on the genealogy of the family of Seth: "It both demonstrates the reign of death, but its insistent refrain, and conspicuously breaks the rhythm to tell of Enoch, the standing pledge of death's defeat." Redemptive beauty in the midst of routine.

"Walked with God" This phrase, which references Enoch, is a rare expression in the Bible. It does not only imply that Enoch was obedient (as some might use the phrase today), but it indicates Enoch had an intimate relationship with God.

Day 2

"Blameless" Noah was not sinless. This word in the Hebrew means "whole, complete." It does not mean without error or mistake.

"Violence" The word here is "hamas," meaning a cold-blooded kind of violence and brutality. The society was unhinged.

"Rooms" The word "rooms" is literally, "nests." What a picture – a boat full of nests!

Day 3

Precise Dates – "On the seventeenth day of the second month" is very specific. In the Bible, specific dates like this were usually reserved for kings, which means this account of Noah was given historical credibility beyond the norm.

Day 4

"Remembered" The word remembered here means more than just to recall a fact. It signifies remembering a covenant partner and acting upon that covenant.

Day 5

"Be Fruitful" Many ancient cultures regarded mankind as bad – something for the gods to reckon with or destroy. But we see here we see human life regarded as good and to be celebrated

Leader's Notes

- As your discussion opens, try to lean in on what your group members look to in order to comfort themselves in the "painful toil" of life. Specifics will help them better understand their sin patterns even when the outworking centers around "acceptable" activities like watching TV, working, eating, sports, shopping...etc. If we're turning to these things for relief instead of the Lord, we are short-changing ourselves.
- As you discuss Noah's obedience, the goal is not just for us to become "as obedient as possible" (you may need to gently correct the discussion if it heads in that direction) but it is for us to realize how we can never be perfectly obedient – Jesus did that for us.
- Escaping the Lord's judgement is an important point to note during the discussion. The Lord provided humanity an escape via the ark. He provides the ultimate escape from His judgement through Christ.
- What is the current place of "waiting" for your group members? This is a great question to help people open up and share about the difficulties in their lives.
- Use the discussion of the Lord hanging His bow in the clouds to emphasize His mercy and the provision for our sins through Christ.

The Call

Have you ever been called to leave everything? Your inheritance? Your livelihood? Your security?

Abram is called to go. He is asked by God to implicitly trust Him with every aspect of his life. Sometimes he succeeds, and sometimes he fails.

The beauty in this story is not to see how well Abram does but to see the relationship with his Creator and King unfold in the midst of times of trials and seasons of blessing.

Week 4, Day 1
Genesis 11:1-26

Questions

1. Who is "us" in v. 11:7?
2. Why was it important to keep the people of the earth from doing the impossible?
3. How is our culture similar to the culture that was trying to build the tower?

Week 4, Day 3
Genesis 12:1-9
Questions

1. What had Abram just done in v. 11: 31?
2. What was God asking him to do in v. 12:1?
3. What was Abram's response to God's call in v. 12: 1?
4. How do you feel about "moving" (whether literally or figuratively) when you've just gotten settled?
5. Conversely, do you feel like you've been waiting a long time for God to give the "move" instructions? What do you do while you wait?

Week 4, Day 4
Genesis 12:10-20
Questions

1. What sin(s) does Abram commit in 12:13?
2. In what jeopardy did this put his wife?
3. What does this reveal about Abram's trust in the LORD?
4. Have you ever been tempted to tell/live a half-truth out of fear? What fears are the most controlling?
5. What did the LORD do in v. 17? What grace did the Lord give in v. 20?

Week 4, Day 5

Genesis 15

Questions

1. What was Abram's faith struggle, as noted in 15:2-3?
2. What causes Abram's struggle to turn to the belief seen in 15:6?
3. Summarize the LORD's promise in v. 15:7-21. What had Abram done to deserve this inheritance?
4. What inheritance has the Lord promised us?
(I Peter 1:3-5)

Digging Deeper

Day 1

The Tower of Babel The unity of people working together is usually praised. But as Derek Kidner says, "Unity and peace are not ultimate goods: better division than collective apostasy."

"Came Down" The people were trying to get to God. They did not expect Him to "come down." A few thousand years later, God came down to in the form of man – our Savior, Jesus.

Day 2

Haran (the place, not the person) Remember that most of the world did not know or have a concept for a personal god. Haran (modern day Turkey) was a center of moon worship, featuring a temple built to honor the moon.

Day 3

"Father's house" and "land" In the ancient near-east, the patriarchal line and land were everything. To leave one's father's house was to give up one's identity. To leave the land was to give up surety of livelihood and income. It would have been clear to early readers/listeners that Abram is called to give up all security.

Day 4

"Say you are my sister" Sarai was Abram's half sister, so this was somewhat of a half truth (a half truth with potentially disastrous consequences). In this culture, if a man wanted to add a woman to his harem, he would kill her husband – but he might negotiate with her brother.

Day 5

"Covenant" In the time before courtrooms and law offices, covenants were important. As the flaming pot of fire passes between the divided animals, both parties are covenanting, in a sense, "So may it be done to me if I do not keep my promise."

Leader's Notes

- A great theme to discuss this week is the idea that God comes to us – we can never get to him, no matter how clever, hard-working, or morally pure we might be. The Tower of Babel is a great illustration of this. Explore with the group what might be some modern-day “trying to get to God” activities.
- Another big concept for this week is the idea that Abraham left everything to go into the unknown. These were the days before email, phones....mail. Leaving meant, almost certainly, that he would never see his family or homeland again. Help your group engage in this idea. What would be the equivalent today? How would they feel about this? Do they know God well enough to take this step?
- Ultimately, this story of Abram is one of trusting God's provision – or not. In Egypt Abram was not willing to trust the Lord's provision for their safety, so he tried to come up with his own solution. Encourage the members of your group to think about, and potentially share, times when they have stepped outside of God's law in order to achieve security.

God's Promise

Waiting is difficult.

Have you ever waited a long time for something that promise that seemed like it would never be fulfilled? Was that promise from another person? Or from God?

Sarah and Abramam have been waiting for a long time. Sometimes they wait well, and sometimes they wait poorly. Despite their antics, the Lord remains faithful and patient.

Can you relate?

Week 5, Day 1

Reading: Genesis 16:1-16

Questions

1. Whom does Sarai blame for the problem in her life (v.2)?
2. What does Abram do (v.2)? To what misleading voices are you sometimes tempted to listen?
3. What relational fallout ensues (v. 4-6)? Can you think of a situation in which taking matters into your own hands resulted in a relational mess?
4. If the angel of the LORD already knew where Hagar was, whose slave she was, and what her name was, why do you think the he asks "where have you come from, and where are you going?"
5. What name did Hagar give to the LORD (v.13)? Do you feel like the LORD sees you right now? Is there a particular area of your life in which you feel like He is not seeing you?

Reading: Genesis 17:1-14

Questions

1. What is God's announcement and request in v. 17:1-2?
2. What is Abram's response in v. 3? How would you feel about making a covenant with someone who had still not fulfilled an earlier promise?
3. Has anything made you "fall face down" lately? Ever?

Reading: Genesis 17:15-27

Questions

1. What was Abraham's response to God's promise?
2. Why do you think Abraham said what he said in v. 18?
3. Can you think of a time in your own life that you have felt like Abraham does here?
4. What does Abraham do in v.23-27?

Reading: Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7

Questions

1. What was Sarah's response to the "visitors'" news?
2. What does Sarah do in v. 15? What was the LORD's response?
3. What happens in 21:3? What do you think is the attitude of Sarah at this point?
4. Have you ever experienced a promise fulfilled after a long period of waiting? How did it make you feel?

Reading: Genesis 22:1-19

Questions

1. Reread v. 2 slowly. What feelings are stirred within you when you read not only, "take Isaac," but "take your son, your only son, whom you love"? What cherished thing/person/dream would be an equivalent sacrifice in your own life?

3. Take a moment to picture yourself in this scene. You have laid the wood. You have bound your child. You have raised your hand. You trust that obeying the Lord is better than obeying every fatherly instinct. How does this make you feel about your relationship with Him? What questions does this raise?

4. How does the provision of the ram make you feel?

5. In light of this passage, how do you think you can better experience the wonder of the gift of the Lamb, Jesus, on a daily basis?

Digging Deeper

Day 1

“Female Egyptian Servant” Hagar was a “maidservant,” not a slave girl, so she answered to Sarai, not Abram. (Which helps explain why Abram seems to defer to Sarai in 16:6.)

“Listened to the voice of Sarai” This Hebrew is only used one other time in Genesis – the moment when Adam agreed to join Eve in eating the fruit. (This does not bode well...)

“Looked with contempt on her mistress” Because perpetuating family lines was crucial to survival, having a servant bear a child for a childless couple was legal and not considered polygamy. Since it was common practice, there was actually a law that forbade servants from disrespecting their mistresses in this very circumstance.

Day 2

“Your name shall be Abraham” Naming was an important sign of authority in the Bible (think of Adam naming the animals).

Day 3

“Circumcised” This was an important rite and sign of the covenant and is still observed in Jewish culture today.

“God went up from him” This indicates that God was present with Abraham in some physical way.

Day 4

“morsel of bread” This was really a feast, as we see by the preparation of a calf, curds, and fresh bread.

Day 5

“Sacrifice him there” Child sacrifice was not uncommon in the ancient Near East, and Abraham would have been familiar with the concept of giving back to God (or “the gods”) a portion of what had been given to him.

Leader’s Notes

- Have you ever behaved badly? We see a lot of “bad behavior” in these passages – but bad behavior doesn’t come out of a vacuum. Your role as discussion leader will be to make sure your group is seeing the root motivations of fear and mistrust behind that behavior. Why does Sarai give her servant to Abram? Why is Abram passive? Why does Hagar scorn...and then fear?
- We also see instances of profound trust, so your job will be to tease that out in the discussion as well. How can Abraham dare take his son – his only son, whom he loves – up onto that mountain? It is because he knows and deeply trusts the Lord. Do we know the Lord in that way? Do we want to know the Lord in that way? Why or why not?
- Finally, you will want to make sure that at some point your discussion emphasizes the justice and mercy of God. He demands payment for sin, even human death. But instead of demanding our deaths, he sent a sacrifice – not a ram in a thicket but his very own son who climbed a hill to lay down his life for us all.

Holy Acrimony

Families are good. Families are hard. Most families we see portrayed in the Bible are messes, just like yours and mine. Abraham's descendants are no exception.

In this account of Abraham, Ishmael and Hagar and finally Jacob and Esau, we see betrayal and abuse. We see hope and disappointment. We see trust and deceit.

But most importantly we see that God is still there. He is there in the midst of the ugly sinfulness that is passed down from generation to generation. He still reaches down to be in the middle of it all.

Week 6, Day 1

Reading: Genesis 21:8-21

Questions

1. How does Ishmael behave, according to v. 9? Do you think this was justified? Why or why not?

2. Where and with what resources is Hagar sent? How would you feel, if you were in her place?

3. We have already experienced the Lord "seeing" Hagar. Now he hears her son crying. How do you feel about God's care for Hagar and Ishmael? What does this reveal about God's character?

Week 6, Day 2

Reading: Genesis 24:1-28

Questions

1. For Abraham or his son, Isaac, to return to the "old country" would have meant at least a certain sense of security, familiarity, and probably wealth. Why do you think Abraham was so committed to the Promised Land as he indicates when he says, "only do not take my son back there"?
2. How do you think the servant felt, having been given such an important task?
3. Rachel more than exceeds the standards of the "test." What is the servant's response in vv. 26-28?
4. How do you feel when a prayer is answered clearly? Is there an area in which you need clarity right now?

Week 6, Day 3
Reading Genesis 24:54-67

Questions

1. How do you feel about the servant's eagerness to return to Abraham?
2. Why do you think Rebekah was willing to go immediately?
3. In what ways do we tend to be resistant to change? Is there an area of your life in which you feel like you should "go," but you are unsure?

Week 6, Day 4

Reading: Genesis 25:19-35

Questions

1. What do you learn about the Lord from vv. 23?

2. If you do the math in vv. 26 and 20, how long was Rebekah barren? What emotions do you think she would have experienced in a culture that associated a woman's worth with her ability to bear children?

3. Esau has been duped. What was the earthly cause of his loss of the birthright (v.29)? What was the real cause (v. 23)? How do you feel about this? What does this mean in your own life?

Week 6, Day 5
Reading: Genesis 27

Questions

1. Much is being "orchestrated" in this passage. Who is really orchestrating these events?
2. How do you feel about Jacob's statement in v. 20?
3. What emotions is Isaac experiencing in vv. 33 and 34? Have you ever felt/been betrayed? How did you deal with those emotions?
4. From an earthly perspective, this family is a broken mess. But according to Genesis 25:23, who is in control? How does this make you feel about the current mess(es) you may be experiencing in your own life or in the life of someone close to you?

Digging Deeper

Day 1:

Ishmael With reference to God, Ishmael was always called na'ar (young boy), but with reference to Hagar, he was always called ye'led (child). Na'ar suggests a relationship of care, while ye'led suggests a biological relationship. It is Ishmael's fault that he and Hagar are cast out, yet it is by his cry that they gain the attention of the rescuer.

Day 2

"to your offspring I will give this land" Abraham's last recorded words are about God's promise.

"Until they have finished drinking...quickly ran...." –

Both of these actions show that Rebekah was above and beyond what the servant sought. The Lord provided clearly and abundantly.

Day 3

Ten days or so – this was a figure of speech that meant anywhere from "a year to ten minutes"

Nurse – Wet nurse, the person who customarily nursed and then raised the child. A surrogate mother.

Day 4

"Prayed" The same word used when Moses intercedes on behalf of Pharaoh during the plagues. Isaac was 60 years old – He had interceded for Rebekah for 20 years.

"A skillful hunter" A man of the open country – this was not favorable, biblically. The Bible tended to favor and commend shepherds, not predators

Day 5

"Prepare me the tasty food I like" The word "like" in this phrase is very sensual. The passage seems to

underline that Isaac's physical appetites overrule the spiritual.

Leader's Notes

- As you can see, we back track a little on day one to revisit Hagar and Ishmael. God clearly has compassion on them, although He has chosen to extend His line through Isaac. Try to steer the conversation away from any perceived political implications of this passage. You probably won't reach a satisfactory resolution and risk wasting precious discussion time.
- One focus of the discussion should be God's control over circumstances. He clearly had designs for the choice of Rebecca and for the dominance of the younger Jacob over the older Esau. Try direct the conversation toward the bigger picture of God's sovereignty for the world and His plan for His people and away from minutiae (e.g., is it ok to pray for parking spaces? Etc.)
- The servant who goes to seek a wife for Isaac demonstrates a touching dependence on the Lord and a sweet time of praise for Him. If you can, bring your group around to remember times prayers were clearly answered and giving praise to God for those times.

New Man, Same God

Most of us love a good transformation story.

Up until this point, Jacob has been a smarmy protagonist. Deceitful and cowardly, we may find it difficult to see him as a hero.

But that's ok, because he's not really the hero. We see this week that God is working to accomplish His plans

Week 7, Day 3

Reading: Genesis 29:31-35

Questions

1. How does Leah describe her situation in v. 32? Have you ever felt this way about a situation?
2. What did Leah hope would happen to assuage her misery after the birth of her first three sons?
3. What was her attitude after the birth of Judah? Has a similar change ever occurred with a situation in your own life?

Week 7, Day 4

Reading: Genesis 30:1-24

Questions

1. Have you ever sacrificed an important relationship in order to get something else you badly wanted? How do you feel about that? Was there redemption in the situation?

2. How does God act in the midst of this sin and chaos? What does this tell you about how God has/does/will act in your life?

Digging Deeper

Day 1

Bethel Means “house of the Lord” (beth = house and El= Lord)

Day 2

Feast (Hebrew word misteh) implies a “drinking” feast. Meaning Jacob likely would have been incredibly intoxicated on his wedding night.

“not our custom” Laban is using a phrase that meant, “this is morally not right.” But he is feigning indignation because he is tricking Jacob.

Day 3

“not loved” Here this phrase literally means, “hated.”

Day 4

Mandrake Plants Mandrake plants are root plants (like potatoes), shaped like a human figures. They were valuable and associated with fertility in the ancient Near East.

Day 5

Name Changing Changing someone’s name indicated an exercise of authority over that person and also signaled a new chapter or designation in that person’s life.

There are three big themes in this week's lesson that stand out. You may be able to cover more in your discussion, but try to hit these for sure:

1. Jacob meets God. Have you ever heard the phrase, "that will put the fear of God into him/her/you"? Well, we get a picture of that actually happening in Day 1. Jacob encounters God. Jacob is afraid. Jacob changes.

This fear is a good kind of fear. It snaps Jacob back to reality – the reality that God is supreme. Some of your group members may have a negative experience with "the fear of God," so make sure to pull the discussion around to the fact that this is life changing, but helpful and holy fear of a good and loving God.

2. Leah is unwanted, but God still sees her. Help your group connect emotionally with this feeling – have they ever felt unwanted, ignored, forgotten? Research shows that being ignored is more harmful to people than being abused (not advocating abuse, of course). How can we better connect with the fact that God sees us? (That will have more to do with God's love and care than our perception.)
3. Jacob wrestles with God, is renamed and is now marked with a limp. Encourage your group members to revisit a time when they have struggled with God. How did that change them....in what ways did they feel "renamed,"...in what ways to they "limp" as a reminder of their encounter with the Lord?

Holy Acrimony

Families are good. Families are hard. Most families we see portrayed in the Bible are messes, just like yours and mine. Abraham's descendants are no exception.

In this account of Abraham, Ishmael and Hagar and finally Jacob and Esau, we see betrayal and abuse. We see hope and disappointment. We see trust and deceit.

But most importantly we see that God is still there. He is there in the midst of the ugly sinfulness that is passed down from generation to generation. He still reaches down to be in the middle of it all.

Week 8, Day 1

Reading: Genesis 37:1-11

Questions

1. Jacob clearly showed favoritism toward Joseph. If you were one of twelve children, and your parents gave your siblings all bicycles but gave you a Porsche, how would you feel?

2. How would you feel if you were one of the siblings?

2. Have you ever experienced or been the victim of powerful jealousy? How can jealousy sometimes show a lack of trust in God?

Week 8, Day 2

Reading: Genesis 37:12-36

Questions

1. Being properly buried was important in Hebrew culture. In light of this, what does the brothers' initial plot to kill Joseph and throw him into the cisterns imply?
2. What does sitting down and eating the midday meal while Joseph is trapped in the cistern show about the brothers?
3. How do you think Joseph's feelings in the cistern compare to his feelings when he was sent to look for his brothers earlier in the day?
4. Put yourself in Jacob's place. What emotions do you think Jacob is experiencing?

Week 8, Day 4

Reading: Genesis 40:1-23

Questions

1. What does Joseph's reply in v. 8 indicate about his relationship with the Lord?
2. Have you ever been forgotten by someone you thought would remember you?
3. Did that make you feel forgotten by God?

Week 8, Day 5

Reading: Genesis 41:1-16

Questions

1. How long has Joseph been waiting for the cupbearer to remember him?

2. To whom does Joseph immediately give credit in v. 16? Do you think this was risky?

3. Do you have a life situation right now in which you feel like you are in prison awaiting rescue?

Week 9, Day 1
Reading: Genesis 41:17-40

Questions

Digging Deeper

Joseph's Coat: Clothing was relatively very expensive during this time. An elaborate coat would have designated Joseph as the head of the family – definitely as the most favored son.

Dreams: Dreams in the ancient world were taken very seriously, often considered a means of divine revelation (especially those dreams experienced by royalty). “Dream literature” existed – kind of like textbooks for wise men, with various common dream symbols described and explained. Double dreams were seen to be particularly significant (double anything, really).

Wells/Cisterns Often dry cisterns were dug just to collect water – not to reach water. Joseph was probably thrown into one of these rain-collecting cisterns.

Caravan Groups traveled together for safety, often tying their camels together, outfitting their animals with bells, and singing travel songs.

Political Prison Potiphar may have had some understanding of Joseph's situation. Instead of having him executed for rape, he puts him in a relatively comfortable political prison.

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Week 9, Day 1

Reading: Genesis 42:1-38

Questions

1. Joseph had the power to do whatever he wanted to his brothers. How do think you would feel if, after many years, you suddenly saw someone(s) who had deeply betrayed you? What might you have done?

2. What does Joseph's response tell you?

3. What hopes and fears seem to be ruling Israel's/Jacob's heart?

Week 9, Day 2
Reading: Genesis 43

Questions

1. How do you feel about Joseph's reaction to Benjamin in vv. 29 and 30?

2. It was clearly socially unacceptable for Hebrews to eat with Egyptians. What do you think the brothers were thinking and feeling as they feasted with Joseph?

Week 9, Day 3

Reading: Genesis 44

Questions

1. The brothers "tear their clothes" in reaction to the cup being found in Benjamin's sack. Clothes were expensive in that culture. What do you think this action meant? Do we have a similar outlet for emotion in our culture? Why do you think that is/isn't?

2. How do you think the brothers are feeling during this ordeal?

4. Have you ever felt that someone might be angry or displeased with you? What would be your response if that person spoke like Joseph speaks in v. 4?

5. What does v. 8 reveal about Joseph's theology? Can you say these words about a situation or circumstance in your own life?

Week 9, Day 5

Reading: Genesis 46:1-4, 50:15-21

Questions

1. God once again introduces himself to Jacob in v. 46:3. What do you think this communicates.

2. Why do you think the brothers (still deceitful, in spite of Joseph's kindness), were so contrite? Have you ever felt this way?

3. Reread v. 21. Do you feel like God, who reached down to us through Jesus, cares this much about you? Why or why not?