

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS CHAPTERS 12-23 - ABRAHAM, A MAN OF FAITH - AND DOUBT.

The book began with an account of a creation which was very good,(1,2) followed by a description of what went wrong and its impact on two generations of one family.(3,4) Chapter 5 summarises the first ten generations of human history – one by one they were born, fathered sons and died, as God had warned them they would. Two men stand out for the same reason; they were men of faith.(Heb.11:5-7; II Pet.2:5; Jude 14) Both were also preachers of the gospel to their generation. Enoch demonstrated eternal life because he escaped death. Noah showed the way to eternal life through death and resurrection, pictured in the ark.

Chapter 6 explains the latest effect of sin, now attacking family life, and how God must act in judgement. Again it was in one family which trusted Him that God demonstrated His solution. Noah, while building the ark, God's means of salvation for that generation, was also God's prophet to the people of those days.

In chapter 7 Noah and his family committed themselves to the ark Noah had been urging others to enter. God did exactly what He said He would do. The world, as it was, was destroyed. In chapter 8, Noah and the family began a new life, based on all that God had promised, with a sacrifice, looking forward again to the cross. Chapter 9 begins with God's new commission to Noah to be fruitful and multiply, but almost at once Noah showed that he was a son of Adam, by getting drunk and causing his son, Ham, to despise him. This would have consequence on the next generation as it always does.

Chapter 10 describes the first few generations of Japheth, Ham, and Shem's descendants and therefore the ancestors of all people living today. It is interesting to try from history to identify your own ancestors. Chapter 11 tells us of yet another example of man's determination to run his own life and God's response, not this time a flood, but the confusion of language, a problem we have had to live with ever since. Almost certainly 'a tower whose top will reach into heaven' refers not to a belief God was above the clouds but to a desire to see the stars more clearly to foretell the future instead of trusting God. The chapter concludes with a record of the family of Shem from Babel to Abram.

From Babel, families scattered worldwide to give rise to the enormous variety of nations, tribes and distinct language groups we know today. The story now focuses on one family, that of Abraham, from whom would come a group of neighbouring nations whose histories would continue to intertwine for many centuries. Abraham found favour with God, not because he was special, but because, like Abel, Enoch and Noah, of the attitude of his heart towards the Lord.(Heb.11:8-19) The Bible calls it faith. He was not only a tremendous example of faith but also of doubt. He was just like us.

Again let me encourage you to review the titles you gave to the sections of the previous study which also corresponded well to the chapters. Look for overall themes developing which give continuity to the story and its spiritual message. It is probably again appropriate to stick with the chapters as a good way of studying this long passage on the life of Abraham, but it falls easily into three main divisions, 12-15; 16-20; and 21-23. Read the whole story through first, and, as you do, try to find a title which suits each chapter. It will help you to recall what the chapter was about when you come to it again.

Section 1 - chapters 12-15

Q.1 What were the three great steps of faith in Abraham's life? (Heb.11:8-19) Identify the first two steps in Genesis 12 and the later one in chapter 22, and show what they consisted of in practical terms? What do they correspond to in our lives?(Gal.3:26-29)

Q.2 What was wrong with Abram calling Sarai his sister when they were in Egypt?(12:11) How did he show himself to be a true son of Adam? What effect did his actions have on his marriage and his neighbours? How do we make similar mistakes? And with what consequences? How did Abram put the situation right? (Gen.13:1,4; Eph.5:23-33)

Q.3 Why did Abram's and Lot's workers have strife?(13:7) Did Abram and Lot handle the problem in the best way? What should we do if we do not get on with another Christian?

Q.4 Was Lot wrong to live in a city like Sodom?(13:12) Compare the two occasions Lot and his family got into trouble, in chapters 14 and 18,19. What was the difference between Abram's roles on each occasion? What can we learn from these stories about how to help a family in trouble - and how not to?(II Pet.2:7,8; Lk.17:28-32)

Q.5 Whom does Melchizedek picture to us?(14:18) What can we learn from his role in Abram's life?(Heb.4:14-5:10; 6:13-7:28)

Q.6 Having promised a son to Abram, why did God keep him waiting so long? Trace his attitude to God's promise of a son who would be the means of all God's blessing to him, from chapter 15 to the birth of Isaac. When is his attitude an example of faith and when is it not?(Heb.11:11-13; Rom.4:1-25; Gal.3:6; James 2:23)

Section 2 - chapters 16-20

Q.7 In what way are Abram and Sarai's marriage problems in chapter 16 a consequence of their mistakes in chapter 12? How does this story show them to be 'in the likeness of Adam'? Who was the angel of the Lord who appeared to Hagar and helped her when she was desperate? What can we learn from this story? (Jn.1:18; 5:37; 14:6-9; Col.1:15)

Q.8 What do these two stories teach us about how to pray and how not to? Why did the Lord change Abram and Sarai's names? When and why does He do the same thing in the New Testament? Who were the three men who visited Abraham for lunch? What does this story remind us about hospitality?

Q.9 What practical lessons about how people are saved can we learn from chapter 19?

Q.10 Some 'experts' regard the story in chapter 20 as a garbled version of chapter 12. Why is that obviously not so? How does it again show Abraham as a son of Adam?

Section 3 - chapters 21-23

Q.11 Was what happened to Abraham and Sarah in 21:1 a surprise? What are the three most significant phrases in 21:1,2? How are they similar to chapter one?

Q.12 Why did Hagar become a solo mother?(21:14) How did Christ meet her need?

Q.13 What is the later significance of (a) Mt.Moriah and (b) a lamb as a sacrifice?(22:2,7) Who spoke to Abraham on Mt.Moriah? What reason does the New Testament give for God asking Abraham to offer up Isaac? What are we to learn from his example? And from Isaac's example?(I Chron.21:18; II Chron.3:1; Lev.23:12; Jn.1:29; I Cor.5:7; Heb.11:17-19)

Q.14 What does chapter 23 teach us about Christian business ethics?

Q.15 Use a concordance to look through the New Testament references to Abraham. What are the 5 main ideas that are repeatedly linked with his name? Summarise the message of Abraham's life in a way that shows these five ideas.