

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS

CHAPTERS 24-36 - THE NEXT THREE GENERATIONS

The story of Abraham was a roller coaster of ups and downs. There were great times of faith when he was an inspiring example, and major moments of doubt when he crashed hard. We can learn from both. Hebrews 11 continues to provide telling comment on his story, but speaking only of the periods of faith. The first described in Gen.12:1-5 and highlighted in Heb.11:8 was his obedience to God's call to leave the security of family and to receive the inheritance God had promised in Canaan, just as we do when we first trust Christ. The second mentioned first in Gen.12:6-9 and commented on in Heb.11:9 was his daily life of dependence on God in his new land. In the same way we are to go on trusting the Lord daily for every need. Thirdly Sarah, and of course Abraham, believed God's promise of a son, born to them both, in whom God would fulfil all His promises to them of blessing. Gen.21 describes how this finally happened after 25 years of waiting and wondering. Heb.11:10,11 encourages us to believe that God in the same way gives us Jesus as the fulfilment of all His promises to us. Finally Gen.22 tells the extraordinary story of how Abraham was willing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice to God. Heb.11:17-19 gives the secret, faith that God was able to raise the dead, just as He later raised His only Son, of whom Isaac was a picture.

In between are the other times when Abraham showed he was a son of Adam. In Gen.12:10-20 he went in self-sufficiency to Egypt instead of trusting God to provide in a difficult time. He told a half-truth to protect himself at Sarah's expense and must have been painfully self-conscious when he was caught out. In chapter 13 he separated from Lot's group to avoid conflict rather than trusting God to resolve it. Gen.14 and 15 are again examples of faith before in Gen.16 he and Sarah tried to solve God's problem of their infertility by adultery, with devastating effects on the family and his nation for centuries to come. In chapter 17 Abraham tried to offer his mistake, Ishmael, to God to be the means of blessing. God refused. In chapter 18 he failed to recognise the Lord when He came to visit, and Sarah laughed at the promise of God. Not surprisingly when God wanted to rescue Lot in chapter 19, He had to do it without Abraham. In Gen.20 he made the same old mistakes of chapter 12 all over again. All these are examples of doubt not faith.

Despite so many failures, God did not give up on Abraham and continued to meet him on the basis of sacrifice and to repeat His promise of a son. God was faithful even in the long periods when Abraham was not. He still is.

The second half of Genesis traces the next three generations in Abraham's family. After the inspiring figure of Abraham, despite his times of doubt, these are ordinary people - just like us. They had moments of faith when they showed all the qualities of the Creator but most of the time they were living in their own strength, eating of the fruit of the tree of good and evil. When they did this they could only copy the mistakes of the generations before - and suppose that this was real freedom. The results of sin, then and today, are the same as they were in the garden of Eden, and the first to suffer are the family and the neighbours. But there is always a way back...

Look back over your titles for the sections in the previous study. See if further consideration allows you to improve on them and be sure you record your titles in a place where you can use them in future. In this next part of the book we will again go a chapter at a time but useful divisions might be 24-27; 28-30; 31-33; 34-36. As always be sure that you have read the whole story, preferably a couple of times, before you start on the questions. It will always make much better sense if you really know it first.

Section 1 - chapters 24-27

Q.1 If you were asked to give a talk to a Bible class on 'how a Christian chooses a wife' what ideas might you draw from the story of Isaac finding Rebecca? While many of us come from cultures where the family no longer choose a wife for us, can we still learn something from the role that both families played in bringing Isaac and Rebecca together?

Q.2 How does 25:8 contrast with the present day Western view of old age? What can we learn from Isaac's prayer in 25:21? What mistakes did Isaac and Rebecca make as parents? What was Jacob's belief in chapter 25 as to how he could receive God's blessing? How do we make the same mistake?

Q.3 Compare the first half of chapter 26 with chapters 12 and 20. How do the earlier stories help to explain Isaac's behaviour? How is the situation described in 26:34,35 explained by the condition of Esau's parents' marriage? What can we learn from 26:18-33 about how to do business as a Christian?

Q.4 How did Jacob in chapter 27 still show the same view as in chapter 25 of how to get God's blessing? If Jacob was the believer and Esau the unbeliever are we therefore to copy Jacob's example?

Section 2 - chapters 28-30

Q.5 Compare Esau's way of choosing a wife with that of his father. Compare Jacob's meeting with Christ with your own. On what conditions did he base his relationship with God? With what results? How do we make the same mistakes with the same sad consequences?

Q.6 Compare Jacob's choosing of a wife with that of Esau and Isaac.

Q.7 Why was Jacob's home situation in chapter 30 such a miserable mess? How do similar situations arise today?

Section 3 - chapters 31-33

Q.8 In Laban, Jacob met someone who was as big a cheat as he was? How might the whole situation have been different if Jacob had trusted the Lord to get him out of it?

Q.9 Who was the man with whom Jacob wrestled all night? What difference did that night make to Jacob's behaviour? Are we to wrestle with God?

Q.10 What was so surprising about the meeting between Jacob and Esau? Why did the new relationship between them not last?

Section 4 - chapters 34-36

Q.11 Did Jacob's sons handle what happened to their sister in chapter 34 in the right way? In what way were they 'in the image of Jacob'?

Q.12 It had taken 20 years for Jacob to get back to Bethel in chapter 35. What had he learned in those years? Why did God bring him back to the same place? Why was he always setting up pillars of stones? Should we do the same when we have a great experience of God?

Q.13 Why do we have a list of Esau's descendants, in chapter 36, since Esau was not the chosen son?