

IN THE BEGINNING

By Gail Keffer

The Bible is full of many characters, more than any novel, but each is different. Some of them have a major part in the story of God's creation and love. Some do not have a major part in the story, but they tell us about ourselves. We all have a role in life here on earth because we are God's people. But, each of us is unique to God who cares not only for each of us as individuals, but also for the lily of the field and the sparrow.

We will attempt to study twelve of these people in the series of devotionals, "In the Beginning," and see how each of them tells us something about ourselves. Are we different than they were? We are all God's creation and while God loves each of us and forgives us, God knows our ways, and knows our weakness before we tell Him or ask for forgiveness. We are each unique and blessed just as the people were in their day and so will the people of tomorrow be blessed. Each of the people in this series is in the book of Genesis. It is only one book, but it says so much about us, about how we act and react. It tells us how people have been from the beginning of time.

Sometimes we tend to think that everyone in the Bible was a saint. They weren't. Sometimes we wonder why God put those "bad" people in the Bible, and sometimes we wonder how we could ever be as good or bad as some of them were! They had human frailties just as we do, but through their frailties, God was able to use them to do His will. We can do His will also if we are willing to allow Him to guide us when we ask. This series from the book of Genesis includes devotionals on: Adam, Eve, Abel, Cain, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Esau, Joseph, and Noah.

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Adam

“This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.”
Genesis 5:1

We are told that after God had made the earth God knew that it needed human form, and so God created Adam and then Eve to be his helpmate. We believe we are made in the likeness of God, just as Adam was and that we are all part of God’s creation.

Why did God need Adam? Only two people were promised “a rose garden.” We know that Adam was told to till the earth. However, it was abused just as we would have done! We’ll get to Eve’s part in a later devotional! Why does God need us? What is our purpose on earth? If we believe the Bible to be the word of God, then we realize that we are here to tell others about God and to live a life that is full and worthy of His love.

But, God gave them a second chance, and gives it to us every day. God knows we have a sinful nature because He gave us free will to do as we please. We often think we can handle it better than God, or at least make it happen faster!

Just as a first child changes the lives of the parents, the creation of Adam and man changed the pattern of life for God. Why do we want children? We believe they are a blessing, and I believe that God thinks we are a blessing today, every bit as much as when Adam and Eve were created.

God must be upset with us at times just as we get upset with our own children and other people in general, but God is always there. God never leaves us if we accept him into our lives. We know that we are told that God laughed at some people and cried for others. God does the same for us today, just as for the people mentioned in the Bible. We have an unconditional love. There is no better gift.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the creation and the order you have placed for us. We don’t understand how you did it, or why, but we are thankful that you cared and also that you have given us free will to do as we want. And especially, dear Lord, we are thankful for your love and forgiveness when we, just like Adam and Eve, sin. We know that you will forgive us if only we ask because you love us so much. Amen.

1. Do you ever wonder why God created us when God had control of heaven already and did not need the headaches we would give Him?
2. Do you ever look at a flower or a tree, or even a bug, and wonder how God knew to create all things to “work together for good.”
3. Do you ever just look at the colors in the sky and see the beauty in one area that God has created and wonder “Why”?
4. How do we know that God loves us?

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Eve

“And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.” Genesis 3:20

All of us know that Eve was formed from the rib taken from Adam; that she was the first woman, and she was the mother of Cain and Abel. The name occurs only five times in the Bible and that is mostly in the second, third, and fourth chapters of Genesis. From those few references, much has been “surmised!”

Any theories about Adam and Eve have come down through the years. Was she created because Adam was lonely? The Bible leads us to believe that. She was also to serve as a help mate for him. Many people use these passages to show that man and woman were created to be joined in marriage and work together. Some feel she is inferior because she was formed from a rib of Adam. Some want to say that Adam was inferior because God removed one of Adams’s ribs and Satan spoke first to Eve.

We know that God created them in his likeness. But, we know they were tempted and fell for that temptation. Since that time, we have all been tempted many times and we often let Satan win in things both small and great. We have a free will.

The first account of the creation tells us that they were created male and female. The second narrative is more explicit and detailed. From it, we learn that Adam was supposedly formed from the earth and God gave him the breath of life. Then Eve is set forth in beauty and romance as a rib is taken from Adam during his sleep to form Eve to be his help mate. We are told that Adam did not find a suitable companion among the animals and Eve is formed as bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. And so we have male and female, formed in an intimate relationship.

Many authorities have read much into this creation. The Bible has much to say about man and woman in marriage and if the Bible is interpreted in its strictest sense, then man and woman will both be good to each other. If the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church, how much more could a woman ask? Remember, God gave his son for the church. And if the woman is to be subject to her husband who loves her enough to give himself, she will be loved and never abused in any way.

The scripture tells us "Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh." The innocence of the newly created couple is clearly indicated, but then they are tempted and they seek to hide from the Lord. Adam and Eve bore three sons, Cain, Abel, and Seth.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we know that you created us, and you love us more than we can ever imagine in our finite minds. Help us to show that love to each other and to love our families as you have loved us. Amen

1. Why did God create Eve?
2. Can you accept the Bible story of creation in a literal sense, or is it allegory?
3. Are we ever tempted to try to hide from God?
4. What is the most important part of the story of the creation of man and woman?

Abel

“By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking.”
Hebrews 11:4 RSV

Abel is mentioned in at least six books of the Bible and yet we know very little about him. Actually three of the times are in the New Testament, and he was killed in Genesis! We know he was a son of Adam and Eve. We know that he was killed out of jealousy by his brother, Cain, even though the Bible says he was innocent. We know that he was a shepherd. And if we read the Bible passages that mention him, we realize that God had great regard for him and used him to explain life and faith to other people. We think he was probably only a young man or even a youth when he was killed. Why is his story important?

We don't go out and kill our brother. Or do we? We hear people say that others do that because they see it on television, or they know children are learning it from playing war games? Cain didn't have any of those “guidelines” but he had jealousy, a trait which all of us have to one degree or another. This passage talks a lot about faith – that simple thing that we cannot see, but that we must have if we believe in Christ as our personal Savior. In a letter written to the Hebrews, the section containing the information about Abel is part of a great section on faith. “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old received divine approval.” Hebrews 11:1-2.

The writer then goes on to mention Abel and Enoch as having been approved by God because they had faith. We all want to have approval. We all want to be liked. But the ultimate is to be loved by God. Abel was loved by God because he had faith. We don't know what Abel said to Cain when he was going to kill him, but we do know that Abel had God's approval and blessing and so he now has eternal life

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Bible and the words of wisdom that it gives to us. Sometimes we don't understand why you have put something like this in there for us to read, and then as we see Your love, we realize that even in the worst circumstances you are there for us if we only believe in You as our Lord and Savior. Help us, dear Lord, to realize this free gift is ours if we only ask. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why would such an early person, who had not seen other violence to our knowledge, have killed his brother in jealousy?
2. How did God use Abel's death to tell about faith?
3. Why does God bring it up again in the New Testament?
4. How can we be assured of approval by God and the gift of eternal life?

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Cain

“And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?” Genesis 4:9

Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve, is really only talked about in Genesis 4. There are a couple references later, but his whole story is contained in just a few verses.

Abel became a herdsman; Cain was a farmer, a tiller of the soil. As time went on the brothers brought a sacrifice to God. Abel took the firstborn animals of his herd, the choice cuts of meat. God accepted the sacrifice of Abel. Cain took his offering, but we are not told exactly what he took. We do know that God did not accept his offering.

Cain began to sulk and God spoke to him and warned him about his attitude. God told him that if he did well, he would be accepted. God also told him that if he did not do well, sin would be waiting to take over his life. The choice had to be made by Cain. We need to remember that he was given a chance to do right. He had free will to choose.

Cain became even more jealous. While the brothers were out in the field, Cain killed Abel, his brother. God came to Cain and said "Where is Abel your brother?" Cain responded, "How should I know? Am I my brother's keeper?"

Cain gave that proverbial answer with another question! But God told him that he would be cursed forever. Cain responded, "My punishment is too much. I can't take it! You've thrown me off the land and I can never again face you. I'm a homeless wanderer on Earth and whoever finds me will kill me."

Many stories and theories have been written about this first murder. Many have ideas on what sacrifice Cain took that was unacceptable. Many have tried to blame the unacceptable sacrifice on his attitude at the time of the sacrifice. The Bible does not answer that question. We do know that we can have forgiveness if we will face God and ask. From the Scripture, it appears that Cain was unable to ask for forgiveness and was doomed to be a wanderer for the rest of his life. We also know that he did not do his best for the Lord.

An old song tells us to give of our best to the Master. Even in our work, God doesn't demand perfection, but God does ask us to do our best. God knows there will be differences because God created us, and expects us to use the talents that we have been given. God helps us to do our best.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you have given so much to each of us, and yet we sometimes feel that we don't have sufficient to be like others. Help us to realize that all you ask is that we do the best we can with what you have given us. Amen.

1. Unfortunately we set a standard in school, at home, and on the job, that we think all should achieve. How can we help people to know that we only expect them to do the best they can? How can we answer with love? How can we help build self-esteem?
2. Can we cause problems when we compare? Remember God gave Cain a chance, and only asked him to do his best. We compare children? Friends? Workers? Personal belongings? Prayers? Before criticizing, do we always do our best?

Abraham

“Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him. I have chosen him that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord.” Genesis

Abraham is called the father of Christianity and Judaism. His name means “Father of Multitudes.” How can this be? Before we put God in the Proverbial box like we so often do, we have to realize that God can use us in many ways just as Abraham was if we allow ourselves to be used or guided. We may not be the father of multitudes, or live to be 175 years old, but we can be part of God’s people.

Abraham was favored by God many times. It seems that each time God blessed him, he did something wrong! He was just so human! God promised that he would be the father of nations, but Abraham wasn’t willing to wait for God’s work, so he and his wife decided to muddy up the waters by having him sleep with her maid. But God blessed them, and continued to work with Abraham.

Twice, he didn’t tell the whole truth to Kings and told them that Sarah was his sister. Well, in fact she was his half-sister, but she was also his wife. He told her not to tell that part of the relationship. It was just a little half truth or white lie! Both times, God turned it around and he was favored.

Eventually, in God’s time, he and his wife were given a son, Isaac, and he would become the father of the nations, but not before God tested him. God led him to an altar where Abraham thought he was to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Again, Abraham had not totally listened to what God had planned for him. Just before the time for the sacrifice, God spoke to him and gave him an acceptable sacrifice to spare his son.

Whatever he did, God was always there. Abraham was so much like us. We do something really good, and then something else that is wrong. It may even be in opposition to the good we have just done. God knows we are human. God created us and gave us that wonderful gift of free will. Sometimes, life would be much easier if God told us what to do. God will, if we pray, but we are always given the chance to do it our way.

We learn from Abraham that God has a plan for each of us. And, most important that whatever we choose to do, God is always with us. God may not like what we choose, but God will always love us, and always forgive us if we ask. What a blessing for Abraham, and what a blessing for us.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we know that you have made each of us in your own image. We thank you for the free will you have given us so that we may choose how to live our lives. Help us to seek your will and then to follow your plan for our lives through your amazing grace and forgiveness. Amen

1. Have you ever been chosen to do something that you really did not comprehend?
2. Have you ever been challenged to tell the “little white lie” to help protect yourself?
3. How does God help us to see His plan for us? Does God test us?
4. Are there times when you want God to do His will, and not involve you?

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Sarah

“Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?” Genesis 17:2 KJV

God chose Abraham and Sarah to bear children that would become the generations of today. Yes, we had Adam and Eve, but people kept straying from the truth then, just as they do now. So, God chose Abraham at age 100 and Sarah at age 90, far past the child bearing age.

When Sarah heard that she would bear a child, she laughed. When God asked about her laughing, she denied it; she was afraid. But, she could also have been very happy. For years she had been scorned by other women because she had no children. God approached Abraham and asked why she had laughed. God tested Abraham to see if he thought anything was too great for God to do.

God told them that Sarah would have kings of nations descended from her. Do you blame her for being afraid? It was more than Sarah could comprehend.

Then, God told Abraham that about the same time next year, Sarah would have a son and his name would be called Isaac which means “laughter”. In time Isaac was born and it was the beginning of the 12 tribes, but not before God warned Abraham and the other people that they must change their ways or be destroyed. Isaac was followed by his son, Jacob who also tried to heed God’s warnings.

Sarah knew she was 90 and Abraham was 100. How was this going to happen; were they doubting the power of God? As we read the Bible we are told time after time how people doubted God’s power just as we doubt it today.

If we believe that God created the world and all that is in it, how can we not believe that He could help a 90 year old woman have a child? If God created the moon and the stars, how could God not help us explore the glory given to us? I never cease to be amazed when I look at a flower, and wonder how the small plant knows what nutrients to take from the ground, and why is it so beautiful. I wonder at the green hues in the spring and the colored leaves in the fall. I wonder at the small baby and his wonderful future. God gives the knowledge of medicine, the spirit of exploring in many areas. God gives us love and forgiveness. God gives us everything we could ever want and more.

If we don’t accept God and the fact that we are not in charge, how could we possibly think that things such as the beauty that surrounds us daily just happens. We too laugh just as Sarah did because we don’t understand.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for all that you have given to us. Help us to realize that through You all things are possible, whether they are small or large. We are all equal in your eyes. Amen.

1. How would we have reacted if told the promise given to Abraham and Sarah?
2. Why did Sarah laugh? Why did Abraham doubt?
3. Have you ever doubted God in anything large or small, only to find out that if you ask, God will answer?
4. How can we help others to see the power of Our Heavenly Father today?

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Isaac

“And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.” Genesis 17:19

Isaac’s birth, the son of Abraham and Sarah, was in many ways a miracle. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90. He was their first and only child. He was the one chosen by God to bear children who would eventually become the twelve tribes of Israel. But that is not the part played by Isaac immediately. You may remember that Isaac was the one that Abraham bound and was about to sacrifice when God intervened and showed Abraham a more appropriate offering.

Abraham wanted to make sure that Isaac did not marry a Canaanite so he sent one of the men servants to find a suitable wife for Isaac. God led the servant to the water fountain where he found a woman who was willing to help them. She was very beautiful. Her name was Rebekah. In a way this was a marriage arranged by God who interceded and had Rebekah at the well when the man servant arrived. The family took him in, and the brother offered him his blessing.

Isaac married Rebekah, but not until he was 40 years old. And then it was another 20 years before Rebekah was able to conceive and bear children. When she did, they were twins. The Bible tells us that they were fighting when they were in her womb, and would continue to fight just as their generations do today. The twins were named Jacob and Esau.

Today we feel that the 12 tribes of Israel are the descendents of Abraham, Isaac and eventually Jacob. The Arab nations of today will say they are the descendents of Abraham and Ishmael. Both are descendents of Abraham. Both claim descent from Abraham, the Jews through Isaac, and the Arabs through Ishmael. However, the true chosen descendents come through Isaac.

Isaac had a hard life; he was deceived by his sons and his wife. God continued to bless him and his descendents. We can wonder why, but then we can wonder why we have so many blessings today when we don’t deserve them. We are all the children of God and God loves us. Isaac lived a long life and was buried with Abraham and Sarah. Jacob carried on the family line.

Prayer: Lord, we have been given so much, and yet we always want for more. Help us to be satisfied and know that we have been given everything that we need, and particularly your Son, Jesus Christ, a gift we can never repay. Amen

1. Why did Abraham not go through with offering Isaac as a sacrifice?
2. Why was Abraham concerned with the wife for Isaac? Would you want your marriage arranged?
3. Even though Isaac had a hard life, he did not complain to God. Are we too apt to complain at times?

Rebekah

“Behold, Rebekah is before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken.” Genesis 24:51

Rebekah was the wife of Isaac, but it was not a romantic “first love” as we usually think. Abraham, Isaac’s father was concerned that Isaac marry the right woman. So God sent a servant to Canaan to get a bride for Isaac. The servant went loaded down with gifts to seek the perfect wife for Isaac! But the servant was worried; as he neared the land he prayed that God would lead him to the right woman. He asked God to lead the right one to him and then, he wanted to have her offer to help water the camels also!

The words were barely out of his mouth when Rebekah came out with a water jug on her shoulder. She was beautiful, and she offered to hold the jug while he drank and offered to get water for his camels also. God had answered his prayer.

When the camels had finished drinking, the man gave Rebekah the gifts. Then he asked if she could help him with lodging for the night. She answered that there was plenty of room for him and food and lodging for his animals.

He went to the house and told them his story. When they asked Rebekah, she said she was ready to go. So the servant, Rebekah, and her nurse left with her family’s blessing to join Isaac. When they got back to Isaac he loved her and married her. Rebekah bore twins, Esau and Jacob, to Isaac. It was a difficult pregnancy for her, and she asked God why she was having so much trouble. He answered that her two sons would become two nations, and the older would serve the younger. Isaac favored Esau, but Rebekah favored Jacob. The life of Isaac and Rebekah had its problems. She was very beautiful. Once, Isaac said she was his sister because he feared the Philistines, but he got caught and explained that he was afraid for them. The king protected them and threatened anyone who would harm either one of them.

Rebekah helped her favorite, Jacob, to get the family blessing over Esau who was the elder through disguising Jacob. Soon, Jacob had to leave because Esau was upset with him. Jacob married from the land that his mother and father requested. Esau married a woman that did not meet with the family approval.

Eventually Jacob, his family, and the flocks returned home. Jacob and Esau met and reconciled in love. Later, Jacob was renamed Israel by God and he became the ancestor of Christ, and the leader of many nations. When Isaac and Rebekah died, they were buried with Abraham and Sarah.

Prayer: Lord, you are an awesome God and Savior. Before we can do anything, we know that you know us and are always there to help us. When we fall, you pick us up. Thank you for your guidance as we seek to do your will here on this earth. Amen

1. Why did Abraham want to arrange a good marriage for Isaac?
2. Is it important that we marry the right person? What steps should we take to try to marry the right person?
3. Rebekah was willing to go and marry Isaac. Can we expect God to guide us in marriage?

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Jacob

“And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.” Genesis 32:28

Jacob was the son of Isaac and Rebekah, a twin. But these twins were nothing alike. Jacob was a quiet man and liked to dwell in tents. His brother, Esau, was an expert hunter, a sportsman, but we'll discuss him on another day. The parents took sides with them. Isaac loved Esau, and Rebekah loved Jacob. The Bible says that from the time they were in the womb of Rebekah they were fighting.

As they grew, Esau was to receive the birthright and blessing, but Jacob tricked his father and received both of them. When Esau realized what had happened, he set out to punish Jacob, but Rebekah interfered and sent Jacob away to live with her brother's family.

On the way, Jacob had a dream about a ladder to Heaven. Throughout his life, God spoke to him many times; the ladder is probably the best known. Jacob knew that God was with him and promised to worship God. He did some back sliding, but he always came back and God forgave him and continued to bless him. He told his uncle that he wanted to marry Rachel, and the uncle made him work for seven years for her, and then sent the other daughter, Leah, to him. When Jacob realized he had been tricked, he spoke to his uncle and worked for another seven years to get Rachel as his wife.

Through his years in that area, he prospered, and had twelve children. His name was changed to Israel, and his children became the twelve tribes of Israel. Only two of the sons are well known; they are Joseph and Benjamin, both the children of Rachel.

One day God appeared to Jacob and told him to go back to his home land and take his family with him. He was afraid. During that trip he wrestled with God, and he was blessed by God. He feared many things and places, but especially Esau. When he approached Esau, Esau ran to meet him and threw his arms around him in love. And Jacob said he had seen the face of God in the love from his brother Esau. He continued on his journey to his homeland then and continued to live his life for his God.

Jacob is mentioned many times in the Bible in both the Old and New Testament. Most of the time it is in reference to the fathering of the nations of Israel, and he is mentioned with his father Isaac, and his grandfather, Abraham.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we know we are human and often time we do things that are not satisfactory in Your eyes, but you love us and forgive us. Help us to lead our families in the way of love so that Your love may shine through us. Amen.

1. Is there ever a problem with parents favoring one child over another?
2. What caused Jacob to trick Esau and gain the birthright and blessing?
3. Did Jacob trick Esau or did Esau exercise his free will and want the food for the birthright rather go out and hunt? Remember he was the sportsman.
4. Can we see the look of love from God in our brother's/sister's eyes? What a blessing we receive if we can.

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Esau

“And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came. . . And Jacob said ‘Receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me.’” Selected portions of Genesis 33

Esau was the son of Isaac and Rebekah, a twin. But these twins were nothing alike. Esau was an expert hunter, a sportsman. Jacob was a quiet man and liked to dwell in tents. Esau had a hairy body, but Jacob was smooth skinned. The parents took sides with them. Isaac loved Esau; Rebekah loved Jacob. The Bible says that from the time they were in the womb of Rebekah they were fighting.

One day Jacob had some food. Esau came in from the field and was faint because he had not eaten for a while. He asked Jacob for his food and Jacob told him that he would give him the food if Esau gave him the birthright. Esau found the food more important and said, “Behold, I am at the point to die, what profit shall this birthright do to me.” So he gave it to Jacob. At this point Esau showed a weakness according to many sources. The food was more important to him.

At a later time, when Isaac was getting old he called Esau and told him to go to the field and get some venison and give it to him. He was going to give the family blessing to Esau. Again Rebekah interfered and dressed Jacob in hairy clothes and had him deceive Isaac into giving him the blessing.

This angered Esau. When he saw Jacob with the blessing, he set out to kill his brother as soon as Isaac had died. Rebekah talked with Isaac, and then told Jacob to flee for his life. Jacob fled to the land that belonged to his uncle. Esau stayed. He knew that his father did not want them to marry a woman from Canaan, so that is exactly what he did.

Esau did well, and Jacob did well, the Lord told Jacob to go to his home land. Jacob feared Esau because he knew that his brother had threatened to kill him, but the Lord told him he would be protected. So, Jacob did as the Lord commanded. When he met Esau, Esau threw his arms around him and forgave him; and the two of them wept. Jacob offered gifts, but Esau was satisfied with what he had. When Isaac died, Jacob and Esau buried him near the tomb of his parents, Abraham and Sarah.

Then Esau went to another part of the land but his descendents were never blessed as were the descendents of Jacob, because Esau had sold his birthright. His descendents were eventually destroyed by the tribes of Israel.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the wonderful gift of eternal life you have given us. We often sin, but help us never to forsake you. Help us to not hold earthly good above your love and to realize that you will provide everything we need if we only ask. Amen.

1. Why did Esau sell his birthright? Was it justified? Remember we are told that he was the sportsman of the two. Is the older always the stronger sibling in the family?
2. Was it right for Rebekah to tell Jacob to flee for his life?
3. How did Esau receive Jacob when he returned to the land of his father?
4. Do we have relatives or close friends that we should go to see and welcome the friendship again with love?

Joseph

“Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors.” Genesis 37: 3

Joseph, the son of Jacob (Israel) and Rachel, was a favorite of his father. Jacob had 12 children. Joseph was the 11th one. According to the Bible, because Jacob favored Joseph, he made him a coat of many colors. This made the other brothers jealous. Then he had a dream and told the other brothers about it so their jealousy was kindled and they decided to get rid of him. They stripped him of his coat of many colors and sold him to some traveling merchants. Then they dipped his coat into blood and led Jacob to believe that Joseph had been killed.

Joseph was taken into Egypt by the people who bought him. The Lord was with him and he prospered, as did all around him. Eventually the master’s wife wanted Joseph to be with her, but Joseph declined her request. Probably because she was unsuccessful in her attempt, she told her husband that he had slept with her and so the master put Joseph in prison, and again the Lord continued to bless him because he was a good man.

After some time, some of the people had dreams, and Joseph was able to interpret them, but they were not satisfied with his interpretation. One day the Pharaoh had a dream and Joseph was called to interpret it. Joseph told the Pharaoh there was going to be a great famine after years of plenty. Joseph gathered together all the things he could to help the people during the famine until he could not even number them any more.

When the famine came, people went to Joseph for help, even people from other countries. As the time of the famine spread, eventually the brothers of Joseph also went down from Canaan to buy. These were the same brothers who had sold Joseph and had led their father to believe that he had been killed. Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. He used an interpreter to talk with them. He gave them the grain and put their money back in the sack with the grain. He had done this on purpose to test them. He had also asked them to bring Benjamin with them the second time. Even Jacob was afraid to let Benjamin go, but eventually they were so hungry they had to take him with them and return. The second time Joseph put a silver cup in the grain and then caused them to be checked on their way home. Since they had supposedly stolen the cup, they were brought back to Joseph. Eventually they were told by Joseph who he was. At first they did not believe, and then they were afraid. But Joseph loved them and only wanted to see his father again. He and his family were given everything they could want including some land, and he was able to have his father go down to Egypt. Jacob, Israel, did not want to be buried in Egypt so Joseph was able to take him and his whole family back to Canaan where his father was buried. Joseph lived to be 110 years old and was always faithful to God in his caring for those that had wronged him.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we read the story of Joseph and know that trusting you, we will still be challenged by other people. But help us to see also, that you will always be with us and help us if we only believe. Strengthen us as we face opposition in little things that we may have strength to witness for you and love those around us. Amen.

1. How does jealousy help us to do things to hurt not only the one person, but others also?
2. How did jealousy affect the treatment Joseph received from the Pharaoh’s wife?
3. Was it right for Joseph to trick his brothers when they came for grain?
4. Through all of this Joseph never lost his trust and dedication to God? Would we be the same if thrown into a pit and then into prison?

Noah

“And spared not the old world, but saved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.” II Peter 2:5

We have all heard of the great flood when all the earth was covered with water and only Noah and his family were spared. God told them to build an ark and take two of each animal, male and female, to save them during this time. We are told in the Scriptures that all the other people were sinning and would not repent.

We are told that Noah was a very righteous man and that he had absolute faith in God. We have to believe this if we stop and consider how people must have ridiculed him and mocked him for building such a large vessel and believing that the world would be destroyed by water. Also, he was trying to tell people to repent of their evil ways, so we can imagine that he was not very popular, and that he was often the subject of criticism. Noah was supposedly the tenth generation after Adam so the world of that time had quite a few people. Those people had been given everything and then turned against the very God that had given it to them. Noah was 600 years old when the Lord came to him and told him to build the ark.

After the flood, Noah built an altar to God and made an offering. God made a covenant with Noah that the land and every living creature would never be destroyed again. God promised that while the earth remained there would be seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. There would be green plants and meat for food. The sign of God’s covenant was the rainbow which many of us see and recall the beauty that only a great God could create as well as other promises of that covenant.

Noah lived to be 950. Many stories are told about his three sons. Ham is said to have been cursed because he saw his father drunk. Noah's three sons were generally thought of as the founders of the populations of the three known continents, Japheth’s descendents went to Europe, Shem descendents went to Asia, and Ham descendents went to Africa.

Many theories have been written over the years about Noah and his family, but none have been able to destroy the story or the faith of Noah in God through this miracle. Noah’s building the ark alone was a sign of his absolute faith.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father we know that you have created everything on earth and that you have done it all for good. Help us to have the faith of Noah as we accept each day on this earth knowing that you have also prepared another place for those of us who believe just as you restored the earth to Noah and his family so many years ago. Amen.

1. A beautiful musical has been written called TWO BY TWO which tells the story of the flood and in it we see the life of Noah’s wife. How do you suppose she and the children reacted to this vision from God? Remember an angel appeared to both Mary and Joseph!
2. Can we compare anything in our life to the faith shown by Noah at that time?
3. How can we believe the story of Noah to be true? What signs do we have?
4. Has God ever asked you to do something that you thought was out of line? What about talking to someone about your faith? What about taking a stand or not going along with “the crowd?” What about believing that prayer is the only answer to a difficult time?

Notes: These notes are given to help the reader research further into the life of the character if desired.

Adam: Adam is mentioned many times in the Bible, but the primary information about him is found in Genesis 2 through chapter 5. Other mention on him can be found for reference in Deut. 32:8; Josh 3:16; Josh 19:33-36; I Chron 1:1; Job 31:33; Ezek 3:9; Zech 7: 12; plus several mere mentions in the book of Ezra. In the New Testament, references may be found in Luke 3:38; Roman 5:14; I Cor. 15:22 and 45; I Tim. 2:13.

Eve: Eve is mentioned predominantly in Genesis chapters 3 and 4. Other inferences are made to her, but specific details about her are limited to the first book of the Bible.

Abel: Abel's life story is predominantly in Genesis 4. Other references in the New Testament include Matt 11:35; Luke 11:51; and Heb. 11:4;

Cain: Cain's life story is told in Genesis 4 and 5. New Testament references include Heb 11:4; and I John 3:12

Abraham: Abraham, originally called Abram, is introduced to us as Abraham in Genesis 17:5. His story continues through Genesis 17 until his death in Genesis 25, but his influence is mentioned throughout the book of Genesis and the entire Old Testament. Some of the New Testament references to note include Matt 1:1, 2 and 17; Matt 8:11; Mark 12:26; Luke 3:8 and 34; Luke 13:16 and 28; Luke 16: 22-25, 29-30; John 8: 33-58; and numerous references in Acts, Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, and Hebrews.

Sarah: Sari, wife of Abraham, is renamed Sarah in Genesis 17. Her story continues in the book of Genesis through her death in Genesis 23, but numerous references to her continue through the rest of Genesis. Reference to her as mother is also mentioned in Isa 51:2.

Isaac: Isaac is born to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 17:19 and references to him continue through Genesis until his death in Genesis 35. Isaac as part of the long lineage is mentioned throughout the Old Testament and mentioned many times in the New Testament for his faithfulness to God. Probably one of the best references to his faithfulness in the New Testament is found in Hebrews 11:9-20. Other references are usually his being part of the line descended from Abraham.

Rebekah: Rebekah is introduced in Genesis 24:15 when she speaks to the stranger and offers him water. Her life with Isaac continues through the book of Genesis to chapter 27 with just a couple references to her after that chapter.

Jacob: We first hear about Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25:26. His life and influence are given in the book of Genesis through chapter 50, but the main emphasis of his life and how it influenced him and his family are included in the 10 chapters on Genesis from 25-36. Although Jacob is mentioned many times in the other books of the Bible, it is in reference mostly to his lineage.

Esau: Esau, the twin of Jacob, is also first mentioned at his birth in Genesis 25:25. His life is predominantly told in chapter 25 through 33 of Genesis, but his family and some other comments about him continued through Genesis 36 and other references to him in Deut. 2. In the New Testament he is mentioned three times – Romans 8:13; Hebrews 11:20; and Hebrews 12:16.

Joseph: Joseph's birth is first mentioned in Genesis 30. His story is long as was his influence, and it continues until his death in Genesis 50. Brief references are made to his lineage throughout the rest of the Old Testament. His place in the lineage of Christ and his being one of the fathers of Israel are mentioned in the New Testament.

Noah: Noah's birth is mentioned in the long lineage in Genesis 5. His story continues through Genesis 9, but references are made to his faithfulness throughout the Bible. In the New Testament, three references are made to his faithfulness and the flood in Hebrews 11:7; I Peter 3:20 and II Peter 2:5.

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