



# GENESIS

## INTRODUCTION

### ▶ GOD AT WORK

Everything—literally everything—begins here

**2:3** *Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

The Bible begins with words that have become famous: “In the beginning God created.” God, like an artist, fashioned a universe. How can we grasp the grandeur of this?

Michelangelo, perhaps the greatest artist in history, may help us to understand. He painted Rome’s famous Sistine Chapel to retell the Genesis story of creation. His experience proves one thing: Creativity is work.

### An Exhausting Effort

Michelangelo had 6,000 square feet of ceiling to cover with art—an area bigger than a professional basketball court. Anyone who has put a new coat of paint on a ceiling has caught a hint of the physical difficulty of such a task. But Michelangelo’s plan called for more than 300 separate, detailed portraits—each drawn by hand, without benefit of computer-generated imagery or performance capture technology. For four years the 5’4” artist devoted all his labors to the exhausting strain of painting the vast overhead space with tiny brushes.

Sometimes he painted standing on a huge scaffold, a paintbrush high over his head. Sometimes he sat, his nose inches from the ceiling. Sometimes he painted while lying on his back. His back, shoulders, neck and arms cramped painfully.

In the long days of summer, he had light to paint 17 hours a day, taking food and a chamber pot with him on the 60-foot scaffold. For 30 days at a stretch he slept in his clothes, not even taking off his boots. Paint dribbled into his eyes so he could barely see. Freezing in the winter, sweating in the summer, he painted until at last the ceiling looked like a ceiling no more. He had transformed it into the creation drama, with creatures so real they seemed to breathe. Never before or since have paint and plaster been so changed.

### The Miracle of Life

But, as Michelangelo knew very well, his work was a poor, dim image of what God had created. Over the plaster vault of the Sistine Chapel rose the immense dome of God’s sky, breathtaking in its simple beauty. Mountains, seas, continents—all these, and much more, are the creative work of God, the Master Artist.

God’s world, so much bigger and more beautiful than Michelangelo’s masterpiece, is the product of incomparably greater energy. As author Eugene Peterson has written, “The Bible begins with the announcement, ‘In the beginning God created,’ not ‘sat majestic in the heavens’ and not ‘was filled with beauty and love.’ He created. He did something.” In the beginning, God went to work.

Genesis focuses attention on this creative, hardworking God. The word *God* appears 30 times in the 31 verses of chapter 1. He grabs our attention in action. Genesis is an account of his deeds, ringing splendidly with the magnificent effort of creation.



## Mending Broken Pieces

Genesis also talks about the work of humankind, but at a certain point the tone of the narrative changes abruptly. God had scarcely finished creating the universe when human rebellion marred it, like a delinquent tagging the Sistine Chapel. Chapters 3–11 of Genesis portray a series of disasters: Adam and Eve’s rebellion, Cain’s calculated murder of his brother, the worldwide wickedness leading to the great flood, and human arrogance at Babel.

God immediately began to mend the pieces his creatures had broken. He narrowed his scope from the whole universe to a single man—not a king or wealthy landowner, but a childless nomad, Abraham. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Rachel, Joseph—the upward thrust from chapter 12 on came through God’s work in these startlingly human individuals. They were far from perfect, yet God picked them up where they were and carried them forward. He promised them great things. He moved through them to restore his art. His creative activity did not stop on the seventh day.

## Genesis and Revelation

Many people read the Old Testament as though it portrays the “bad times” before Jesus. But that’s not an accurate picture. Actually, Genesis links to the last book of the Bible, Revelation. The first three chapters of Genesis and the last chapters of Revelation are like brackets of hope around the sadness of life marred by sin, death, suffering and hatred. In Genesis we learn that life didn’t start out that way. In Revelation we find out it won’t end that way either. But the Old and New Testaments take place between those brackets. Through Abraham, through Moses and, ultimately, in Jesus, God is hard at work to make things right.

## How to Read Genesis

Genesis is one of the most enjoyable Old Testament books, full of memorable stories of people and events. It is a crucial book to know, for the rest of the Bible often refers back to it.

Genesis tells the story of many beginnings—the beginning of the universe; the beginning of sin; and perhaps most important, the beginning of God’s work to restore a sinful humanity.

The book breaks into two major sections. The first 11 chapters take a big view. They give the origins of human society, including the familiar stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah’s ark and the tower of Babel. Here, just a few words carry great significance. You need to read slowly and reflectively, for what happens in a single line may echo off events for centuries to come. For instance, Adam and Eve’s sin, because it was the first sin, became an emblem of disobedience against God.

Beginning at chapter 12, Genesis tells a different kind of story—that of a single family. The pace of the story slows to develop the personalities of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. These fathers and sons are full of human faults and oddities. Do you recognize any of their traits in people you know?

Seeing their fully human personalities, try to understand what God’s plans were for them as individuals—and through them, for the restoration of a whole world marred by sin.

## High Points in Genesis

The following chapters from Genesis are of special note and included in the Guided Tour of the Bible reading plan. See page xi for further details.

**Chapter 1:** The story of creation.

**Chapter 2:** Adam and Eve.

**Chapter 3:** Sin enters a perfect world.



**Chapter 4:** Cain and Abel.

**Chapter 7:** Noah and the great flood.

**Chapter 8:** The end of the great flood.

**Chapter 15:** God's covenant with Abraham.

**Chapter 19:** The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

**Chapter 22:** God tests Abraham.

**Chapter 27:** Jacob cheats his brother Esau.

**Chapter 28:** Jacob, fleeing Esau, dreams about God.

**Chapter 37:** Joseph is sold into slavery.

**Chapter 41:** Joseph rises to the second-highest position in Egypt.

**Chapter 45:** Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers.

### People You'll Meet in Genesis

Adam and Eve (p. 7)

Cain and Abel (p. 9)

Noah (p. 16)

Abraham (p. 18)

Lot (p. 21)

Ishmael (p. 24)

Sarah (p. 25)

Isaac (p. 30)

Rebekah (p. 35)

Jacob (p. 38)

Laban (p. 43)

Rachel (p. 48)

Esau (p. 51)

Joseph (p. 57)

### The Beginning

**1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

<sup>3</sup>And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. <sup>4</sup>God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning — the first day.

<sup>6</sup>And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” <sup>7</sup>So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. <sup>8</sup>God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning — the second day.

<sup>9</sup>And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. <sup>10</sup>God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

<sup>11</sup>Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. <sup>12</sup>The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and

trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup>And there was evening, and there was morning — the third day.

<sup>14</sup>And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, <sup>15</sup>and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup>God made two great lights — the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. <sup>17</sup>God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, <sup>18</sup>to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup>And there was evening, and there was morning — the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup>And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” <sup>21</sup>So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>22</sup>God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” <sup>23</sup>And there was evening, and there was morning — the fifth day.

## GUIDED TOUR • GENESIS 1

### A BOOK OF BEGINNINGS: GENESIS GIVES THE WHO, NOT THE HOW

**1:1,31** *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ... God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.*

The story of the Bible — more, the history of the universe — starts with the simple declaration, “God created.” The rest of this chapter fills in what he created: stars, oceans, plants, birds, fish, mammals and, finally, man and woman.

Genesis 1 says little about the processes God used in creation. You’ll find no explanations of DNA or other scientific principles behind creation. For this reason, controversy springs up on the Internet, in classrooms, and even in courts — between those who see God’s hand in creation and those who see only the blind forces of evolution at work. The opening chapter of the Bible does, however, insist on two facts:

1. *Creation is God’s work.* “And God said ... And God said ... And God said” — this phrase beats a cadence all the way through the chapter. Butterflies, waterfalls, bottlenose dolphins, praying mantises, kangaroos — they are all God’s idea. This magnificent world is like an interactive, hands-on museum displaying God’s artistic genius. All that follows in the Bible reinforces the clear message of Genesis 1: Behind all of history, there is God. Every helium atom, every spiral galaxy, every living creature exists because God wants it to. Think of Genesis 1–3 as an artist’s signature on a painting; God is saying, “This is mine.”

<sup>24</sup>And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. <sup>25</sup>God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,<sup>a</sup> and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

<sup>27</sup>So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup>God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

<sup>29</sup>Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. <sup>30</sup>And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds

in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground — everything that has the breath of life in it — I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

<sup>31</sup>God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the sixth day.

**2** Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

<sup>2</sup>By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup>Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

### Adam and Eve

<sup>4</sup>This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

<sup>5</sup>Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth<sup>b</sup> and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, <sup>6</sup>but streams<sup>c</sup> came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. <sup>7</sup>Then the LORD God formed a

<sup>a</sup> 26 Probable reading of the original Hebrew text (see Syriac); Masoretic Text *the earth* <sup>b</sup> 5 Or *land*; also in verse 6 <sup>c</sup> 6 Or *mist*

2. *Creation is good.* Like a bell, another sentence tolls softly throughout this chapter: “And God saw that it was good.” In our day we’re inundated with alarming reports about destructive forces in nature — many wrought by our own hands: superbugs, smog, climate change, vanishing ice caps, massive islands of garbage floating in our oceans. Much has changed, much has been spoiled, since creation. Genesis 1 describes the unspoiled world God designed. Whatever beauty we sense in nature today echoes, however faintly, that pristine state.

In fact, the Bible opens and closes with much the same scenery: a garden, watered by a river, with human beings living in the actual presence of God. The two scenes are like brackets of perfection around the history of a badly scarred planet.

In 1968, astronaut Frank Borman read from Genesis 1 during a Christmas Eve broadcast from outer space. Gazing out his window, he saw Earth as an awesomely beautiful and terribly fragile ball, hanging alone in the darkness of space. Today, it’s a view that any of us can get — not just from Google Earth, but from the opening words of the Bible.

## Life Questions

Think of a time when you noticed — really noticed — the beauty of the natural world.

*To continue the Guided Tour reading plan, turn to page 6.  
You can find the overall plan on pages xi–xiii.*

man<sup>a</sup> from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

<sup>8</sup>Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. <sup>9</sup>The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

<sup>10</sup>A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. <sup>11</sup>The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. <sup>12</sup>(The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin<sup>b</sup> and onyx are also there.) <sup>13</sup>The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. <sup>14</sup>The name of the third

river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

<sup>15</sup>The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. <sup>16</sup>And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup>but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

<sup>18</sup>The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

<sup>19</sup>Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in

<sup>a</sup> 7 The Hebrew for *man (adam)* sounds like and may be related to the Hebrew for *ground (adamah)*; it is also the name *Adam* (see verse 20). <sup>b</sup> 12 Or *good; pearls*

<sup>c</sup> 13 Possibly southeast Mesopotamia

## GUIDED TOUR • GENESIS 2

*Continued from page 5*

### ONE SHINING MOMENT: THE WORLD AS GOD INTENDED IT

**2:7** *The LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*

After presenting the cosmic view in chapter 1, Genesis repeats the story of creation, this time narrowing the focus to human beings. We alone, of all God's works, are made in God's image (verse 26). People disagree on what exactly the phrase “image of God” means. Does it refer to immortality? Intelligence? Creativity? Relationship? Perhaps we understand its meaning best by thinking of “the image of God” as a kind of mirror. God created human beings so that by looking upon them, he sees reflected something of himself.

Genesis makes the point that human beings differ profoundly from the rest of creation. We recognize this difference instinctively: The law has a different penalty for killing an animal than it has for killing a person. Human life is “sacred.” Alone of all creation, human beings receive the breath of life from God himself.

### History Set in Motion

Genesis 2 shows human history just getting under way. Marriage begins here: Even in a state of perfection, Adam feels loneliness and desire, so God provides woman. From this time on, marriage takes priority over other relationships. Work begins here too: Adam assumes a role of authority over the animals and plants. Humans begin to exercise a kind of mastery over the rest of creation.

Only the slightest hint of foreboding clouds this blissful scene of Paradise. It appears in verse 17, in the form of a single negative command from God. Adam and Eve enjoy perfect freedom with this one small exception, a test of their obedience.

Throughout history, writers and artists have tried to imagine what a perfect world would look like: a world of love and beauty, a world with no guilt or suffering or shame. Genesis 1–2 describes such a world. For the last time in many thousands of years it could be said, “They felt no shame.”

### Life Questions

Think about a close friend or family member. In what way does this person reflect God? Does he or she possess a quality or personality trait that reflects what God must be like?

*To continue the Guided Tour reading plan, turn to page 8.  
You can find the overall plan on pages xi–xiii.*

the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup>So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam<sup>a</sup> no suitable helper was found. <sup>21</sup>So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs<sup>b</sup> and then closed up the place with flesh. <sup>22</sup>Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib<sup>c</sup> he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

<sup>23</sup>The man said,

"This is now bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called 'woman,'  
for she was taken out of man."

<sup>24</sup>That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

<sup>25</sup>Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

### The Fall

**3** Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

<sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup>but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

<sup>4</sup>"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup>"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

<sup>6</sup>When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. <sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

<sup>8</sup>Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

<sup>10</sup>He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

<sup>11</sup>And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

<sup>a</sup> 20 Or the man

<sup>b</sup> 21 Or took part of the man's side

<sup>c</sup> 22 Or part

## ADAM AND EVE

*First in Everything*

They were the first human beings on earth, part of God's original creation. As such, Adam and Eve set the standard for everything that followed. Their lives illustrate what God loves in human beings—as well as what he loathes.

*First ecologists.* Adam was the first to name animals, the first to tend a garden, the first to be placed in charge of all the creatures. Adam and Eve took on the huge task of caring for the earth and guiding its proper use.

*First to form a relationship with God.* Adam and Eve were made in God's image. God conversed with them and gave them responsibilities. When they failed God, they felt ashamed and feared meeting him.

*First married couple.* God himself made the introductions and gave the first couple the delight of each other, body and soul. As 2:24 suggests, this suitability is the basis for all marriages. Both Jesus and Paul quoted this passage in their comments on sex and marriage (see Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7–8; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31). Marriage led to parenthood, though the very first child (Cain) brought pain as well as joy.

*First to sin against God.* Although they only had to follow directions, they failed. In response to their sin, they hid from God and blamed each other. "Think of all the squabbles Adam and Eve must have had in the course of their nine hundred years," wrote sixteenth-century church leader Martin Luther. "Eve would say, 'You ate the apple,' and Adam would retort, 'You gave it to me.'"

In the end, the first two human beings were banished from Paradise and driven out into a world full of problems God had never intended for them to confront. In that, as in everything, these two led the way for all of us.

### Life Questions

Are you in a position to set an example for others? What can you learn from Adam and Eve's experience?

**100** PEOPLE YOU SHOULD KNOW

<sup>12</sup>The man said, “The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

<sup>13</sup>Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

<sup>14</sup>So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,

“Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

## GUIDED TOUR • GENESIS 3

*Continued from page 6*

### THE CRASH: REBELLION, NAKEDNESS, HIDING AND SHAME

**3:3** *But God did say, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.”*

“The Fall,” theologians call it, but the event this chapter describes is really more like a crash. Although Adam and Eve have everything two people could want in Paradise, still a thought nags at them: Are we somehow missing out? Is God keeping something from us? Like all of us, they cannot resist the temptation to reach out for what lies beyond them.

Journalist and author G. K. Chesterton said, “There is only one doctrine that can be empirically verified: the doctrine of original sin.” Genesis gives few details about the first sin. Many people mistakenly assume sex is involved, but something far more basic is at stake. God has labeled one tree, just one, off-limits. The real issue is: Who will set the rules — God or human beings? Adam and Eve decide in their own favor, and the world has never been the same.

The underlying message of Genesis goes against a common assumption about human history that the world has been gradually progressing toward a better and better state. According to these chapters, that assumption is not accurate. On the contrary, humanity crashed against the rocks of its own pride and stubbornness long ago and is still doing so today.

Neither God nor anyone else has been satisfied with human beings since that time. Genesis helps us understand why the universe is so strikingly lovely, yet so terribly tragic. It is lovely because God made it. It is tragic because he entrusted it to us — and we failed.

### Did God Really Say?

Adam and Eve react to their sin as anyone reacts to sin. They rationalize, try to explain themselves and look for someone else to take the blame. The author of Genesis pointedly notes that they also feel the need to hide. They hide from each other by making coverings for themselves because they sense, for the first time, a feeling of shame about being naked. Perhaps the greatest change of all occurs in their relationship with God. Previously, they had walked and talked freely with God in the garden, much as one would with a friend. Now when they hear God’s voice, they hide.

When God discovers Adam and Eve in hiding, he asks three searching questions: (1) Where are you? (And why are you hiding from me?) (2) Who told you that you were naked? (And why did you believe somebody else, not me?) (3) What is this that you have done? (And are you ready to take responsibility for it?)

Genesis 3 tells of other profound changes that affect the world because the creatures chose their own way rather than their Creator’s: Suffering multiplies, work becomes harder, and a new word — *death* — begins trending high in the human vocabulary. Perfection is spoiled forever. All wars, all violence, all broken relationships, all grief and sadness trace back to this one monumental day in the Garden of Eden.

### Life Questions

Have you ever felt hemmed in or stifled by one of God’s commands? How have you responded to this feeling?

*To continue the Guided Tour reading plan, turn to page 10.*

*You can find the overall plan on pages xi–xiii.*

<sup>15</sup>And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring<sup>a</sup>  
and hers;  
he will crush<sup>b</sup> your head,  
and you will strike his heel.”

<sup>16</sup>To the woman he said,

“I will make your pains in childbearing very  
severe;  
with painful labor you will give birth to  
children.

Your desire will be for your husband,  
and he will rule over you.”

<sup>17</sup>To Adam he said, “Because you listened to  
your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which  
I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’

“Cursed is the ground because of you;  
through painful toil you will eat food  
from it  
all the days of your life.

<sup>18</sup>It will produce thorns and thistles for you,  
and you will eat the plants of the field.

<sup>19</sup>By the sweat of your brow  
you will eat your food  
until you return to the ground,  
since from it you were taken;  
for dust you are  
and to dust you will return.”

<sup>20</sup>Adam<sup>c</sup> named his wife Eve,<sup>d</sup> because she  
would become the mother of all the living.

<sup>21</sup>The LORD God made garments of skin for  
Adam and his wife and clothed them. <sup>22</sup>And the  
LORD God said, “The man has now become like  
one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not  
be allowed to reach out his hand and take also  
from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”  
<sup>23</sup>So the LORD God banished him from the Gar-  
den of Eden to work the ground from which he  
had been taken. <sup>24</sup>After he drove the man out,  
he placed on the east side<sup>e</sup> of the Garden of Eden  
cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back  
and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

### Cain and Abel

**4** Adam<sup>c</sup> made love to his wife Eve, and she  
became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.<sup>f</sup>  
She said, “With the help of the LORD I have  
brought forth<sup>g</sup> a man.” <sup>2</sup>Later she gave birth to  
his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the  
soil. <sup>3</sup>In the course of time Cain brought some of  
the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.  
<sup>4</sup>And Abel also brought an offering — fat por-  
tions from some of the firstborn of his flock.  
The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his  
offering, <sup>5</sup>but on Cain and his offering he did  
not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and  
his face was downcast.

<sup>a</sup> 15 Or seed <sup>b</sup> 15 Or strike <sup>c</sup> 20,1 Or The man  
<sup>d</sup> 20 Eve probably means living. <sup>e</sup> 24 Or placed in  
front <sup>f</sup> 1 Cain sounds like the Hebrew for brought  
forth or acquired. <sup>g</sup> 1 Or have acquired

## CAIN AND ABEL

### Blood Brothers

**100** PEOPLE YOU  
SHOULD KNOW

Cain and Abel (chapter 4) were the first of many feuding siblings. After them came Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Rachel and Leah, Joseph and his brothers. It's a theme song in Genesis and in life: Blood kin have a hard time getting along, and they can become bitter rivals.

Cain offered a sacrifice to God and then killed his brother when he learned God had honored Abel's offering. Genesis does not specify why God preferred Abel's offering to Cain's. (Later in the Old Testament, God accepted both animal and agricultural offerings.) Quite possibly, Cain's problem was his attitude (see Hebrews 11:4). Regardless, Cain lost his temper when things did not go his way.

The Bible tells us little about Abel and a good deal about Cain. Sadly, that makes sense because, as sinful humans, we see more of ourselves in Cain than in Abel. Cain wore his emotions on his sleeve: first jealous anger, then defensiveness, and finally shame and fear. In response to his great crime, God both punished and protected Cain. Banished from home and forced to wander all his life, he nevertheless received a measure of protection, “the LORD put a mark on Cain” (4:15).

Cain's children set the pattern for humanity as it has lived ever since, a mixture of good and bad. On the one hand, as musicians, metalworkers and farmers, they helped civilize the earth. On the other hand, Cain's problems got passed down to future generations. Where Cain felt shame for his crime and punishment, his descendant Lamech would boast about his own murderous deed (4:23–24).

### Life Questions:

Which of Cain's responses to God — anger, defensiveness, fear, shame — do you identify with most easily?

<sup>6</sup>Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?<sup>7</sup> If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

<sup>8</sup>Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.”<sup>a</sup> While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

<sup>9</sup>Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

<sup>10</sup>The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. <sup>11</sup>Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup>When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

<sup>13</sup>Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear. <sup>14</sup>Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

<sup>15</sup>But the LORD said to him, “Not so<sup>b</sup>; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. <sup>16</sup>So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod,<sup>c</sup> east of Eden.

<sup>17</sup>Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. <sup>18</sup>To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was

<sup>a</sup> 8 Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac; Masoretic Text does not have “Let’s go out to the field.” <sup>b</sup> 15 Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac; Hebrew *Very well* <sup>c</sup> 16 *Nod* means *wandering* (see verses 12 and 14).

## GUIDED TOUR • GENESIS 4

*Continued from page 8*

### CROUCHING AT THE DOOR: THE WORLD AS GOD DID NOT INTEND IT

**4:7** *“If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”*

In three chapters Genesis has set the stage for human history and now shows how history begins to play itself out. The first childbirth (imagine the shock!), the first formal worship, the first division of labor, the first extended families, the first cities and the first signs of culture all appear in chapter 4. But one “first” overshadows all others: the first death of a human being — a death by murder, one brother killing another.

Sin enters the world through the first family, and by the second generation, people are already killing each other. The early part of Genesis shows God intervening often in response to problems in his new creation. Unable to ignore their horrible regression, God steps in with a custom-designed punishment for Cain. However, the downward slide into sin continues, especially with a man named Lamech.

### One Step Forward, One Step Back

Not all the news is bad. Civilization progresses rather quickly, with some people learning agriculture, some making tools out of bronze and iron, and some discovering music and the arts. In the ancient world, it was the equivalent of a digital revolution, with unrelenting and seemingly unstoppable progress at every turn. In this way, people were fulfilling their role as stewards over the created world.

Despite these advances, humans continue to slide along the track of rebellion. Every person who follows Adam and Eve faces the same choice: to obey or to disobey God’s word. With numbing monotony, all make the same choice as their original parents made.

God’s warning to Cain applies to everyone: “If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

### Life Questions

What do you think you would say if God appeared in person to confront you about your sin?

*To continue the Guided Tour reading plan, turn to page 13.*

*You can find the overall plan on pages xi–xiii.*

the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

<sup>19</sup>Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. <sup>20</sup>Adah gave birth to Jubal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. <sup>21</sup>His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes. <sup>22</sup>Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of<sup>a</sup> bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

<sup>23</sup>Lamech said to his wives,

“Adah and Zillah, listen to me;  
wives of Lamech, hear my words.  
I have killed a man for wounding me,  
a young man for injuring me.  
<sup>24</sup>If Cain is avenged seven times,  
then Lamech seventy-seven times.”

<sup>25</sup>Adam made love to his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth,<sup>b</sup> saying, “God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.” <sup>26</sup>Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh.

At that time people began to call on<sup>c</sup> the name of the LORD.

### From Adam to Noah

**5** This is the written account of Adam's family line.

When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. <sup>2</sup>He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them “Mankind”<sup>d</sup> when they were created.

<sup>3</sup>When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. <sup>4</sup>After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup>Altogether, Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died.

<sup>6</sup>When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father<sup>e</sup> of Enosh. <sup>7</sup>After he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>8</sup>Altogether, Seth lived a total of 912 years, and then he died.

<sup>9</sup>When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan. <sup>10</sup>After he became the father of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>11</sup>Altogether, Enosh lived a total of 905 years, and then he died.

<sup>12</sup>When Kenan had lived 70 years, he became the father of Mahalalel. <sup>13</sup>After he became the father of Mahalalel, Kenan lived 840 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>14</sup>Altogether, Kenan lived a total of 910 years, and then he died.

<sup>15</sup>When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he became the father of Jared. <sup>16</sup>After he became

the father of Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>17</sup>Altogether, Mahalalel lived a total of 895 years, and then he died.

<sup>18</sup>When Jared had lived 162 years, he became the father of Enoch. <sup>19</sup>After he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>20</sup>Altogether, Jared lived a total of 962 years, and then he died.

<sup>21</sup>When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. <sup>22</sup>After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>23</sup>Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. <sup>24</sup>Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

<sup>25</sup>When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he became the father of Lamech. <sup>26</sup>After he became the father of Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>27</sup>Altogether, Methuselah lived a total of 969 years, and then he died.

### 5:24 The Man Who Did Not Die

All but one of the brief biographies in chapter 5 end with the words “and then he died.” We know very little about the exception, Enoch, except that he walked with God. Enoch did not die; he “was no more, because God took him away.” Based on this evidence, Hebrews 11:5–6 commends Enoch as a man of faith, since “without faith it is impossible to please God.”

<sup>28</sup>When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. <sup>29</sup>He named him Noah<sup>f</sup> and said, “He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed.” <sup>30</sup>After Noah was born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>31</sup>Altogether, Lamech lived a total of 777 years, and then he died.

<sup>32</sup>After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth.

### Wickedness in the World

**6** When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup>the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they

<sup>a</sup> 22 Or who instructed all who work in <sup>b</sup> 25 Seth probably means granted. <sup>c</sup> 26 Or to proclaim

<sup>d</sup> 2 Hebrew adam <sup>e</sup> 6 Father may mean ancestor; also in verses 7-26. <sup>f</sup> 29 Noah sounds like the Hebrew for comfort.

married any of them they chose. <sup>3</sup>Then the LORD said, “My Spirit will not contend with<sup>a</sup> humans forever, for they are mortal<sup>b</sup>; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.”

<sup>4</sup>The Nephilim were on the earth in those days — and also afterward — when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

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## 6:2–4 The Sons of God

This mysterious description may refer to the sons of Seth, the line of God’s people from Adam to Noah, or it may refer to angels, called “sons of God” in the Old Testament. However it is interpreted, the point is that evil behavior increased in the world, a fact that led to punishment by a flood.

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<sup>5</sup>The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. <sup>6</sup>The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. <sup>7</sup>So the LORD said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created — and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground — for I regret that I have made them.” <sup>8</sup>But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

### Noah and the Flood

<sup>9</sup>This is the account of Noah and his family.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. <sup>10</sup>Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

<sup>11</sup>Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. <sup>12</sup>God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. <sup>13</sup>So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. <sup>14</sup>So make yourself an ark of cypress<sup>c</sup> wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. <sup>15</sup>This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. <sup>16</sup>Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit<sup>e</sup> high all around. <sup>f</sup>Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper

decks. <sup>17</sup>I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. <sup>18</sup>But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark — you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you. <sup>19</sup>You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. <sup>20</sup>Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. <sup>21</sup>You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.”

<sup>22</sup>Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

**7** The LORD then said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. <sup>2</sup>Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, <sup>3</sup>and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. <sup>4</sup>Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.”

<sup>5</sup>And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him.

<sup>6</sup>Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. <sup>7</sup>And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. <sup>8</sup>Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, <sup>9</sup>male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. <sup>10</sup>And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth.

<sup>11</sup>In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, on the seventeenth day of the second month — on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. <sup>12</sup>And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.

<sup>13</sup>On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. <sup>14</sup>They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according

<sup>a</sup> 3 Or *My spirit will not remain in*    <sup>b</sup> 3 Or *corrupt*

<sup>c</sup> 14 The meaning of the Hebrew for this word is

uncertain.    <sup>d</sup> 15 That is, about 450 feet long, 75 feet

wide and 45 feet high or about 135 meters long, 23

meters wide and 14 meters high    <sup>e</sup> 16 That is, about

18 inches or about 45 centimeters    <sup>f</sup> 16 The meaning

of the Hebrew for this clause is uncertain.

to its kind, everything with wings. <sup>15</sup>Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark. <sup>16</sup>The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD shut him in.

<sup>17</sup>For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. <sup>18</sup>The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. <sup>19</sup>They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. <sup>20</sup>The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than fifteen cubits. <sup>a,b</sup> <sup>21</sup>Every living thing that moved on land perished — birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. <sup>22</sup>Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. <sup>23</sup>Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals

and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

<sup>24</sup>The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days.

**8** But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded. <sup>2</sup>Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky. <sup>3</sup>The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down, <sup>4</sup>and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. <sup>5</sup>The waters continued to recede until the tenth month, and

<sup>a</sup> <sup>20</sup> That is, about 23 feet or about 6.8 meters

<sup>b</sup> <sup>20</sup> Or rose more than fifteen cubits, and the mountains were covered

## GUIDED TOUR • GENESIS 7

*Continued from page 10*

### UNDER WATER: A FINAL JUDGMENT AND A SECOND CHANCE

**7:4** *“Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.”*

The downward spiral of violence and rebellion continues until God finally reaches a decision. Genesis 6:6 records what is surely the most poignant sentence ever written: “The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.” It seems clear that the grand human experiment has failed. God, who has taken such pride in his creation, is now ready to destroy it. He can no longer tolerate the violence that has spread across the world.

Legends of a great flood exist in the records of many cultures: the Middle East, Asia, South America. One Babylonian document in particular, “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” parallels in many ways the account recorded in this chapter. But Genesis presents the flood as an act of God against rebellious people, not merely an accident of geography or climate. The churning waters described here stand as a symbol of how far humankind has fallen. Torrents of water sweep through towns and cities, forests and deserts, destroying every living and man-made thing.

### Few Survivors

Noah’s ark — a huge, ungainly boat riding out the storm — is a different kind of symbol, a symbol of God’s mercy. God has resolved to give the earth a second chance, which explains why he ordered Noah to preserve representatives from every species.

The first human beings made such a mess of things, their rebellion brought down all creation. Yet God’s decision to spare Noah and his family injects a message of hope. These eight people will birth future generations and carry on the story of God’s undying love for his people.

### Life Questions

Many people feel that good and evil, right and wrong, must be defined by each individual. Do you agree?

*To continue the Guided Tour reading plan, turn to page 14.*

*You can find the overall plan on pages xi–xiii.*

on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible.

<sup>6</sup>After forty days Noah opened a window he had made in the ark <sup>7</sup>and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. <sup>8</sup>Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. <sup>9</sup>But the dove could find nowhere to perch because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. <sup>10</sup>He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. <sup>11</sup>When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. <sup>12</sup>He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.

<sup>13</sup>By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. <sup>14</sup>By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

<sup>15</sup>Then God said to Noah, <sup>16</sup>"Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. <sup>17</sup>Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you — the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground — so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it."

<sup>18</sup>So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. <sup>19</sup>All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds — everything that moves on land — came out of the ark, one kind after another.

<sup>20</sup>Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and,

## GUIDED TOUR • GENESIS 8

*Continued from page 13*

### THE RAINBOW: GOD MAKES A SOLEMN PROMISE

**8:21** *"Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood."*

The gloomy tone of Genesis brightens almost immediately as this chapter tells of Noah and the few survivors landing on an earth freshly scrubbed and sprouting new life. Their first hint of the earth's healing comes from a dove that returns to the ark with an olive branch.

For the first time in years, people actually try to please God. In his first act on land, Noah prepares an offering of thanksgiving. God responds with a solemn promise, the first of several covenants in the Bible between God and the people he loves. While later covenants apply specifically to the Israelites, this one extends to every living creature.

### Adjusting to Sad Realities

The terms of the covenant reveal how deeply Adam and Eve's fall has affected creation. Human sin has cast a shadow across all nature, a shadow of fear and dread that will continue to spread throughout the animal kingdom. God's covenant recognizes certain sad adjustments to the original design of the world, taking for granted that human beings will continue to kill not only the animals, but also each other.

Even so, God promises to never again destroy life with such a massive flood. God vows, in effect, to find another way to deal with the rebellion and violence of humanity, "though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood."

An appropriate symbol — the rainbow — marks this first recorded covenant by God. Noah, like Adam before him, has a chance for a brand-new start. He could set civilization on a whole new course. Before long, though, Noah goes the way of his predecessors. In the last glimpse Genesis gives of him, he is sprawled in his tent, drunk and naked (9:20–27).

What seems like a brand-new story turns out to be a tired recapitulation of the same old human failure.

### Life Questions

How do you react to those in your life who make mistakes and treat you wrongly?

*To continue the Guided Tour reading plan, turn to page 22.*

*You can find the overall plan on pages xi–xiii.*

## 8:11 Peace Symbol

A dove with an olive branch is a symbol for peace, and the origin of that symbol traces back to this account of restored peace between God and his creation. The olive leaf carried by the dove told Noah that lower elevations (where olives grow) were above water and had sprouted new life.

taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. <sup>21</sup>The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though<sup>a</sup> every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

<sup>22</sup>“As long as the earth endures,  
seedtime and harvest,  
cold and heat,  
summer and winter,  
day and night  
will never cease.”

### God’s Covenant With Noah

**9** Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. <sup>2</sup>The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. <sup>3</sup>Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

<sup>4</sup>“But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. <sup>5</sup>And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.

<sup>6</sup>“Whoever sheds human blood,  
by humans shall their blood be shed;  
for in the image of God  
has God made mankind.

<sup>7</sup>As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”

<sup>8</sup>Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: <sup>9</sup>“I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you <sup>10</sup>and with every living creature that was with you — the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you — every living creature on earth. <sup>11</sup>I establish my covenant

with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

<sup>12</sup>And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: <sup>13</sup>I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. <sup>16</sup>Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

<sup>17</sup>So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

### The Sons of Noah

<sup>18</sup>The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) <sup>19</sup>These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the whole earth.

<sup>20</sup>Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded<sup>b</sup> to plant a vineyard. <sup>21</sup>When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. <sup>22</sup>Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. <sup>23</sup>But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across

<sup>a</sup> *21 Or humans, for*    <sup>b</sup> *20 Or soil, was the first*

## 9:4 Reverence for Life

In the Garden of Eden, God had provided plants for humanity’s food. For the first time, he gave people permission to add meat to their diet. Still, an animal was not to be eaten with “its lifeblood still in it.” Kosher dietary requirements kept by Orthodox Jews today derive partly from this statement. Leviticus 17:10–14 gives more detail.

The intent, many commentators believe, was to remind God’s people to show reverence for life, including animal life. This passage makes it clear, however, that human life has a special significance in God’s creation. Ironically, capital punishment in the Bible derives its legitimacy from this passage. Murderers who destroy human life actually attack the image of God. Therefore God demands an accounting.

their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked.

<sup>24</sup>When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, <sup>25</sup>he said,

“Cursed be Canaan!  
The lowest of slaves  
will be to his brothers.”

<sup>26</sup>He also said,

“Praise be to the LORD, the God of Shem!  
May Canaan be the slave of Shem.

<sup>27</sup>May God extend Japheth's<sup>a</sup> territory;  
may Japheth live in the tents of Shem,  
and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth.”

<sup>28</sup>After the flood Noah lived 350 years. <sup>29</sup>Noah lived a total of 950 years, and then he died.

### The Table of Nations

**10** This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood.

#### The Japhethites

<sup>2</sup>The sons<sup>b</sup> of Japheth:  
Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal,  
Meshek and Tiras.

<sup>3</sup>The sons of Gomer:  
Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togarmah.

<sup>4</sup>The sons of Javan:

Elishah, Tarshish, the Kittites and the Rodanites.<sup>c</sup> <sup>5</sup>(From these the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language.)

#### The Hamites

<sup>6</sup>The sons of Ham:  
Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan.

<sup>7</sup>The sons of Cush:  
Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah and Sabteka.

The sons of Raamah:  
Sheba and Dedan.

<sup>8</sup>Cush was the father<sup>d</sup> of Nimrod, who became a mighty warrior on the earth. <sup>9</sup>He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; that is why it is said, “Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD.” <sup>10</sup>The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Uruk, Akkad and Kalneh, in<sup>e</sup> Shinar.<sup>f</sup> <sup>11</sup>From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir,<sup>g</sup> Calah <sup>12</sup>and Resen, which

<sup>a</sup> <sup>27</sup> Japheth sounds like the Hebrew for *extend*.

<sup>b</sup> <sup>2</sup> Sons may mean *descendants* or *successors* or *nations*; also in verses 3, 4, 6, 7, 20-23, 29 and 31.

<sup>c</sup> <sup>4</sup> Some manuscripts of the Masoretic Text and Samaritan Pentateuch (see also Septuagint and 1 Chron. 1:7); most manuscripts of the Masoretic Text *Dodanites*

<sup>d</sup> <sup>8</sup> Father may mean *ancestor* or *predecessor* or *founder*; also in verses 13, 15, 24 and 26. <sup>e</sup> <sup>10</sup> Or *Uruk and Akkad* — all of them in <sup>f</sup> <sup>10</sup> That is, Babylonia

<sup>g</sup> <sup>11</sup> Or *Nineveh with its city squares*

## 100 PEOPLE YOU SHOULD KNOW

### NOAH

#### Starting Over

The problem with the planet God made was not its geology, biology or meteorology. The problem centered, rather, in a single species: *Homo sapiens*. Sin, spreading like a disease, had taken over human thought and action. As a result God chose to blot out much of his creation and start all over again, using Noah for this new beginning.

Characteristically, Noah obeyed right away when God announced his plans. Noah “walked faithfully with God,” says Genesis 6:9. Noah worked hard, building a gigantic, seaworthy structure and storing up food for hundreds of animals. Repeatedly the Bible says that Noah did “just as God commanded him.”

Noah and his family spent more than a year confined in the ark. When they emerged at last to step out on muddy ground, their first action was to worship God. Impressed, God made a new covenant with Noah, promising never again to destroy the earth. He urged Noah and his family to be fruitful and multiply, just as he had urged Adam and Eve in the beginning.

Did this new beginning work? The last glimpse of Noah in this account shows that sin had not been remedied. Noah got drunk, shamed himself in front of his sons and cursed one of his grandsons (9:20–25). Not even a flood could solve the problem of sin, for it lived on inside Noah, as it does in all people.

### Life Questions

If you were given an assignment like Noah's, how would you respond?

is between Nineveh and Calah — which is the great city.

<sup>13</sup>Egypt was the father of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naph-tuhites, <sup>14</sup>Pathrusites, Kasluhites (from whom the Philistines came) and Caph-torites.

<sup>15</sup>Canaan was the father of Sidon his firstborn,<sup>a</sup> and of the Hit-tites, <sup>16</sup>Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, <sup>17</sup>Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, <sup>18</sup>Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathites.

Later the Canaanite clans scattered <sup>19</sup>and the borders of Canaan reached from Sidon toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and then toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboyim, as far as Lasha.

<sup>20</sup>These are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.

#### *The Semites*

<sup>21</sup>Sons were also born to Shem, whose older brother was<sup>b</sup> Japheth; Shem was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber.

<sup>22</sup>The sons of Shem:  
Elam, Ashur, Arphaxad, Lud and Aram.

<sup>23</sup>The sons of Aram:  
Uz, Hul, Gether and Meshek.<sup>c</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Arphaxad was the father of<sup>d</sup> Shelah, and Shelah the father of Eber.

<sup>25</sup>Two sons were born to Eber:  
One was named Peleg,<sup>e</sup> because in his time the earth was divided; his brother was named Joktan.

<sup>26</sup>Joktan was the father of  
Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, <sup>27</sup>Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, <sup>28</sup>Obal, Abimael, Sheba, <sup>29</sup>Ophir, Havilah and Jobab. All these were sons of Joktan.

<sup>30</sup>The region where they lived stretched from Mesha toward Sephar, in the eastern hill country.

<sup>31</sup>These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.

<sup>32</sup>These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.

#### **The Tower of Babel**

**11** Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. <sup>2</sup>As people moved eastward,<sup>f</sup> they found a plain in Shinar<sup>g</sup> and settled there.

<sup>3</sup>They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. <sup>4</sup>Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city,

with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

<sup>5</sup>But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. <sup>6</sup>The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup>Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

## 11:6 Human Ambition

People are ambitious — they want to succeed. Genesis portrays humans as so ambitious that they try to compete with, rather than serve God. This was Adam and Eve's sin (3:5,22), and at Babel people were at it again, in a citywide effort. God frustrated their plans by confusing their language.

<sup>8</sup>So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. <sup>9</sup>That is why it was called Babel<sup>h</sup> — because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

#### **From Shem to Abram**

<sup>10</sup>This is the account of Shem's family line.

Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father<sup>i</sup> of Arphaxad. <sup>11</sup>And after he became the father of Arphaxad, Shem lived 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>12</sup>When Arphaxad had lived 35 years, he became the father of Shelah. <sup>13</sup>And after he became the father of Shelah, Arphaxad lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.<sup>j</sup>

<sup>a</sup> 15 Or of the Sidonians, the foremost <sup>b</sup> 21 Or Shem, the older brother of <sup>c</sup> 23 See Septuagint and 1 Chron. 1:17; Hebrew Mash. <sup>d</sup> 24 Hebrew; Septuagint father of Cainan, and Cainan was the father of <sup>e</sup> 25 Peleg means division. <sup>f</sup> 2 Or from the east; or in the east <sup>g</sup> 2 That is, Babylonia <sup>h</sup> 9 That is, Babylon; Babel sounds like the Hebrew for confused. <sup>i</sup> 10 Father may mean ancestor; also in verses 11-25. <sup>j</sup> 12,13 Hebrew; Septuagint (see also Luke 3:35,36 and note at Gen. 10:24) 35 years, he became the father of Cainan. <sup>13</sup>And after he became the father of Cainan, Arphaxad lived 430 years and had other sons and daughters, and then he died. When Cainan had lived 130 years, he became the father of Shelah. And after he became the father of Shelah, Cainan lived 330 years and had other sons and daughters

<sup>14</sup>When Shelah had lived 30 years, he became the father of Eber. <sup>15</sup>And after he became the father of Eber, Shelah lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>16</sup>When Eber had lived 34 years, he became the father of Peleg. <sup>17</sup>And after he became the father of Peleg, Eber lived 430 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>18</sup>When Peleg had lived 30 years, he became

the father of Reu. <sup>19</sup>And after he became the father of Reu, Peleg lived 209 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>20</sup>When Reu had lived 32 years, he became the father of Serug. <sup>21</sup>And after he became the father of Serug, Reu lived 207 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>22</sup>When Serug had lived 30 years, he became the father of Nahor. <sup>23</sup>And after he became the

## 100 PEOPLE YOU SHOULD KNOW

### ABRAHAM

*God Begins to Rebuild*

12:2

*“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great.”*

After scanning centuries of Biblical history, the narrative of Genesis changes dramatically in chapter 12. Leaving the big picture of world history, it focuses on one individual — not a great king or a wealthy landowner, but a childless nomad named Abram.

At God’s call, Abraham uprooted himself from civilization and began wandering in the wilderness. Like pioneer settlers everywhere, Abraham had to be tough to survive. He moved his flocks from place to place, fought wild animals, negotiated with hostile locals, searched for sources of food and water. Yet this hardly made him unique; lots of tough nomads wandered the Middle East. What made this particular wanderer so important?

### God’s New Way of Working

Abraham was important, first of all, simply because God chose him. Shortly after the destruction caused by the great flood, God picked Abraham as the foundation of a new humanity. On several remarkable occasions God spoke directly to him, promising to make his family great in the land he roamed. The promises were hard to believe: Abraham’s wife was barren, Abraham was getting too old to have children, and he owned no land and had no prospect of any. Nonetheless, God asked Abraham to trust him.

The second reason why Abraham matters follows from the first: When God spoke to him, Abraham listened. He was far from perfect. Sometimes he strayed from the path God put him on, lying and trying to make the promises work out in his own way. Yet in the decisive moments of life, he listened to God and obeyed. He was willing to sacrifice anything for God — even his only son. God put his brand on Abraham, the mark of circumcision. His descendants were to be forever known as “God’s people.”

### Uncensored Truth

The life of Abraham is a fascinating story, true to life, full of bad moments as well as good. He was hardly a theologian; a more comprehensive understanding of God would have to wait for Moses. But Abraham’s faith is the root of Judaism and thus of Christianity. In his encounters with God we get raw, uncensored truth: not religion invented by a philosopher, but religion as it really happens when God meets a person.

No wonder the New Testament cites Abraham more than 80 times, and Paul tells Christians they are the true descendants of Abraham (see Galatians 3:6–9). With Abraham’s life, the story of God’s long-range plans began to unfold. Two thousand years later, Abraham’s descendant Jesus came to fulfill the promises made to Abraham.

### Life Questions

God asked Abraham to leave his home and family and go to a far-off foreign country. If you were in his place, how would you have responded? Has God ever asked anything hard or risky of you?

father of Nahor, Serug lived 200 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>24</sup>When Nahor had lived 29 years, he became the father of Terah. <sup>25</sup>And after he became the father of Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>26</sup>After Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.

**Abram’s Family**

<sup>27</sup>This is the account of Terah’s family line.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. <sup>28</sup>While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. <sup>29</sup>Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor’s wife was Milkah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and Iskah. <sup>30</sup>Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive.

<sup>31</sup>Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there. <sup>32</sup>Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

**The Call of Abram**

**12** The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

- <sup>2</sup>“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;
- I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.<sup>a</sup>
- <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”<sup>b</sup>

<sup>4</sup>So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. <sup>5</sup>He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

<sup>6</sup>Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup>The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring<sup>c</sup> I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

<sup>8</sup>From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

<sup>9</sup>Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

**Abram in Egypt**

<sup>10</sup>Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. <sup>11</sup>As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know what a beautiful woman you are. <sup>12</sup>When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me but will let you live. <sup>13</sup>Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.”

**12:13 Abraham’s Half-Truth**

“A lie is an attempt to deceive,” according to one definition, and by that standard Abraham was lying when he claimed Sarai was his sister. Yet he was telling half the truth, for she was his half sister (20:12). Abraham pulled this same trick years later and got caught again (chapter 20). On both occasions he feared for his life, a situation in which half-truths are particularly appealing.

<sup>14</sup>When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. <sup>15</sup>And when Pharaoh’s officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. <sup>16</sup>He treated Abram well for her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

<sup>17</sup>But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram’s wife Sarai. <sup>18</sup>So Pharaoh summoned Abram. “What have you done to me?” he said. “Why didn’t you tell me she was your wife? <sup>19</sup>Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!” <sup>20</sup>Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.

**Abram and Lot Separate**

**13** So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. <sup>2</sup>Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.

<sup>3</sup>From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier

<sup>a</sup> 2 Or be seen as blessed    <sup>b</sup> 3 Or earth / will use your name in blessings (see 48:20)    <sup>c</sup> 7 Or seed

### 13:3 On the Road

The main trade route through Canaan passed north to south through Shechem, Bethel, Hebron and Beersheba. As Abraham and his children traveled, they naturally stopped in those places. These place-names crop up again and again in the story of God's work.

<sup>4</sup>and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.

<sup>5</sup>Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. <sup>6</sup>But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. <sup>7</sup>And quarreling arose between Abram's herders and Lot's. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.

<sup>8</sup>So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. <sup>9</sup>Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

<sup>10</sup>Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) <sup>11</sup>So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: <sup>12</sup>Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. <sup>13</sup>Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.

<sup>14</sup>The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. <sup>15</sup>All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring<sup>a</sup> forever. <sup>16</sup>I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. <sup>17</sup>Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."

<sup>18</sup>So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.

#### Abram Rescues Lot

**14** At the time when Amraphel was king of Shinar,<sup>b</sup> Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goyim, <sup>2</sup>these kings went to war against Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king

of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboyim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). <sup>3</sup>All these latter kings joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Dead Sea Valley). <sup>4</sup>For twelve years they had been subject to Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

<sup>5</sup>In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him went out and defeated the Rephaites in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emites in Shaveh Kiriathaim <sup>6</sup>and the Horites in the hill country of Seir, as far as El Paran near the desert. <sup>7</sup>Then they turned back and went to En Mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they conquered the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who were living in Hazezon Tamar.

<sup>8</sup>Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboyim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim <sup>9</sup>against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goyim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar — four kings against five. <sup>10</sup>Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills. <sup>11</sup>The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. <sup>12</sup>They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.

<sup>13</sup>A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother<sup>c</sup> of Eshkol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. <sup>14</sup>When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. <sup>15</sup>During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. <sup>16</sup>He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.

<sup>17</sup>After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

<sup>18</sup>Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, <sup>19</sup>and he blessed Abram, saying,

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
Creator of heaven and earth.

<sup>20</sup>And praise be to God Most High,  
who delivered your enemies into your  
hand."

<sup>a</sup> 15 Or *seed*; also in verse 16 <sup>b</sup> 1 That is, Babylonia; also in verse 9 <sup>c</sup> 13 Or *a relative*; or *an ally*

## 14:18 Mystery Man

Melchizedek appeared to Abraham without warning, received tremendous honor and then disappeared. Yet hundreds of years later he earned mention in Psalm 110, and hundreds of years after that in Hebrews 7:11–17. Melchizedek remains a mysterious figure, but he does set an important precedent for the Messiah, demonstrating that the same man can serve as both priest and king. (Jewish priests came from one tribe and kings from a different tribe.) Though Melchizedek did not have the proper family lineage, his spiritual power impressed Abraham, the father of Judaism.

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

<sup>21</sup>The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.”

<sup>22</sup>But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, <sup>23</sup>that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ <sup>24</sup>I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the

men who went with me — to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share.”

## The LORD’s Covenant With Abram

**15** After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram.  
I am your shield,<sup>a</sup>  
your very great reward.<sup>b</sup>”

<sup>2</sup>But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit<sup>c</sup> my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” <sup>3</sup>And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

<sup>4</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” <sup>5</sup>He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars — if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring<sup>d</sup> be.”

<sup>6</sup>Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

<sup>7</sup>He also said to him, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”

<sup>a</sup> 1 Or *sovereign*    <sup>b</sup> 1 Or *shield*; / *your reward will be very great*    <sup>c</sup> 2 The meaning of the Hebrew for this phrase is uncertain.    <sup>d</sup> 5 Or *seed*

## LOT

### *Different Pathways*

People who grow up in similar places and under similar circumstances — neighbors, friends, cousins, even siblings — sometimes end up in very different places in life. Looking back, one wonders what made the difference.

Take Lot, Abraham’s nephew, as an example. Lot apparently latched on to his uncle after losing his own father. When God called Abraham to leave home and strike out for a far-off foreign country, Lot packed up and joined Abraham on the long trip.

Abraham reciprocated with love. Even after the two men separated to make better use of grazing lands, Abraham cared enough about his nephew to stage a daring raid to rescue Lot from kidnappers. Later, when God announced that he would destroy Lot’s adopted town of Sodom, Abraham pleaded with God to save it.

Though Lot started out on the same course as Abraham, he ultimately chose a very different path. Abraham remained a nomad, following God all his days. Lot preferred the cushy surroundings of the city — despite Sodom’s reputation as a center of immorality. Soon Lot grew attached to his comfortable lifestyle.

Even when God sent angels warning him to escape the coming judgment, Lot had a hard time tearing himself away (chapter 14). He lost everything and ended up in a cave, engaged in drunken incest with his own daughters. By contrast, the more faithful Abraham became the father of God’s chosen people and one of the great patriarchs of the Old Testament.

## Life Questions

If someone were to offer you a comfortable, successful position in a morally questionable situation, would you accept? Why or why not?

**100** PEOPLE YOU SHOULD KNOW

## 15:5 Offspring Like the Stars

Can you imagine the leap of faith it must have required for Abraham to accept this incredible promise? What ambivalent thoughts must have tumbled over one another in this old man's mind as he contemplated the breathtaking panorama of the heavens, without the distraction of city lights. "Count the stars ... So shall your offspring be." From my shriveled body? From Sarah's barren womb?

What kind of reaction might you have experienced? Skepticism? Sarcasm? Wonder? Comfort? Would your faith have withstood the test?

<sup>8</sup>But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

<sup>9</sup>So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."

<sup>10</sup>Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.

<sup>11</sup>Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

<sup>12</sup>As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. <sup>13</sup>Then the LORD said to him, "Know for

certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. <sup>14</sup>But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup>You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. <sup>16</sup>In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

<sup>17</sup>When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. <sup>18</sup>On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi<sup>a</sup> of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates — <sup>19</sup>the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup>Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, <sup>21</sup>Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

### Hagar and Ishmael

**16** Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; <sup>2</sup>so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her."

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. <sup>3</sup>So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar

<sup>a</sup> 18 Or river

## GUIDED TOUR • GENESIS 15

### THE PLAN: A NEW APPROACH TO RESTORING HUMANITY

#### 15:1 *After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision.*

After a survey of dismal human failures, Genesis abruptly changes its focus, zooming in on a man named Abram (later changed to Abraham). It's almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of Abraham in the Bible. To the Jews, he represents the father of a nation, but to all of us, he represents far more. After a rocky start he grows into a towering example of faith, his relationship to God so close that for many centuries God himself is known as "the God of Abraham."

In effect, God narrows his focus on the earth by selecting one group of people with whom to develop a unique relationship. Set apart from other men and women, they become God's distinctive treasures. Rather than trying to restore the whole earth at once, God begins with a pioneer settlement, a new race that will, by example, teach the rest of the world the advantages of loving and serving God. Abraham is the father of this new race.

### Abraham's Secret

Genesis 15:6 reveals Abraham's secret: He "believed the LORD, and [God] credited it to him as righteousness." Abraham's trust in God became the foundation for a covenant between his descendants and the living God.

Dozens of other passages in the Old Testament set forth the details of God's covenant, or contract,

## 16:2 A Substitute Wife

According to the customs in Abraham's time, a man could have sex with a servant and include her children in his household. Abraham was trying to get the children he and his wife longed for and to "help God out" in fulfilling his promise of a son. Abraham's way was not God's way, however, and Abraham's attempt led to considerable jealousy and sorrow. The same practice also led to trouble for Jacob's family (chapter 30).

and gave her to her husband to be his wife. <sup>4</sup>He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. <sup>5</sup>Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."

<sup>6</sup>"Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

<sup>7</sup>The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. <sup>8</sup>And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

"I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.

<sup>9</sup>Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." <sup>10</sup>The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count."

<sup>11</sup>The angel of the LORD also said to her:

"You are now pregnant  
and you will give birth to a son.  
You shall name him Ishmael,<sup>a</sup>  
for the LORD has heard of your  
misery.

<sup>12</sup>He will be a wild donkey of a man;  
his hand will be against everyone  
and everyone's hand against  
him,  
and he will live in hostility  
toward<sup>b</sup> all his brothers."

<sup>13</sup>She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen<sup>c</sup> the One who sees me." <sup>14</sup>That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi<sup>d</sup>; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

<sup>15</sup>So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. <sup>16</sup>Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

<sup>a</sup> <sup>11</sup> Ishmael means God hears. <sup>b</sup> <sup>12</sup> Or live to the east / of <sup>c</sup> <sup>13</sup> Or seen the back of <sup>d</sup> <sup>14</sup> Beer Lahai Roi means well of the Living One who sees me.

Continued from page 14

with his chosen people. (The word *testament* means "covenant.") In this chapter God seals his promises to Abraham with a fiery vision. Abraham can expect:

- *A new land to live in.* Trusting God, Abraham leaves his home and travels hundreds of miles toward Canaan.
- *A large and prosperous family.* This dream obsesses Abraham and, when its fulfillment seems long in coming, tests his faith severely.
- *A great nation to come from him.* This promise does not come true until many centuries after Abraham; not until the days of David and Solomon do the Hebrew people at last become a nation.
- *A blessing to the whole world.* From the beginning, God makes it clear that he has chosen the Hebrew people not as an end, but as a means to the ultimate goal of reaching other nations.

## Life Questions

Do people still rely on covenants, or contracts, today? What purpose do they serve?

To continue the Guided Tour reading plan, turn to page 28.  
You can find the overall plan on pages xi–xiii.

### The Covenant of Circumcision

**17** When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty<sup>a</sup>; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. <sup>2</sup>Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

<sup>3</sup>Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, <sup>4</sup>“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. <sup>5</sup>No longer will you be called Abram<sup>b</sup>; your name will be Abraham,<sup>c</sup> for I have made you a father of many nations. <sup>6</sup>I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. <sup>7</sup>I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. <sup>8</sup>The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

<sup>9</sup>Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. <sup>10</sup>This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup>You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup>For the generations to come every male

among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner — those who are not your offspring. <sup>13</sup>Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup>Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

<sup>15</sup>God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. <sup>16</sup>I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

<sup>17</sup>Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?” <sup>18</sup>And Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!”

<sup>19</sup>Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac.<sup>d</sup> I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. <sup>20</sup>And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of

<sup>a</sup> 1 Hebrew *El-Shaddai*    <sup>b</sup> 5 Abram means *exalted father*.    <sup>c</sup> 5 Abraham probably means *father of many*.  
<sup>d</sup> 19 Isaac means *he laughs*.

## 100 PEOPLE YOU SHOULD KNOW

### ISHMAEL

*Second Best*

Ishmael's birth could be called a mistake. It came about because Sarah and Abraham doubted God's promise to provide them a child in their old age. The two conspired to “help God out” by using an Egyptian servant, Hagar, as a substitute wife for Abraham. Then, when God fulfilled his promise and Sarah bore a son of her own, she cruelly drove the servant and her son out into the desert. Ishmael, the innocent victim of this scheming, suffered the consequences.

Yet God also blessed Ishmael. He “heard the boy crying” when Ishmael was dying of thirst in the desert (21:17). God promised that Ishmael's descendants would comprise a great nation. The Bible records that Ishmael had 12 sons and that the Ishmaelites were Israel's neighbors for centuries. In fact, Arabs today traditionally trace their lineage back to Ishmael.

Ishmael apparently kept in contact with his original family; he attended Abraham's funeral, and his daughter would marry Abraham's grandson Esau. Yet his place in Abraham's covenant with God was lost. In a similar way, Ishmael's son-in-law Esau would enjoy the earthly blessings of success, even though God's greatest blessing was reserved for Esau's brother Jacob. In the Bible's accounting, God's covenant blessing always mattered more than earthly success.

### Life Questions

Have you ever tried to “help God out” when you thought he couldn't, or wouldn't, help you in the way you wanted? What was the result?

## 17:17 Laughing at God

Abraham was a man of faith, but his faith was less than wholehearted. Nearing the age of 100, he laughed heartily at God's promise that he would father a son, and he demonstrated his lack of belief by suggesting that God accept Ishmael as an adequate substitute. Sometime later Sarah, his wife, shared in the "joke" (18:12).

twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. <sup>21</sup>But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year." <sup>22</sup>When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.

<sup>23</sup>On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. <sup>24</sup>Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, <sup>25</sup>and his son Ishmael was thirteen; <sup>26</sup>Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that very day. <sup>27</sup>And every male in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

### The Three Visitors

**18** The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.

<sup>2</sup>Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

<sup>3</sup>He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord,<sup>a</sup> do not pass your servant by. <sup>4</sup>Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. <sup>5</sup>Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way — now that you have come to your servant."

"Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

<sup>6</sup>So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs<sup>b</sup> of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread."

<sup>7</sup>Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. <sup>8</sup>He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

<sup>9</sup>"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him.

"There, in the tent," he said.

<sup>10</sup>Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. <sup>11</sup>Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. <sup>12</sup>So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

<sup>a</sup> 3 Or eyes, Lord <sup>b</sup> 6 That is, probably about 36 pounds or about 16 kilograms

## SARAH

### Who's Laughing?

She was beautiful. She had a wonderful, wealthy husband. But above all, Sarah longed for a child. Although God had promised that her husband Abraham would father a great nation, Sarah remained childless as the decades passed. The possibility of giving birth gradually dwindled. More descendants than the stars in the sky? God's promise seemed laughable as Sarah celebrated her ninetieth birthday.

A resourceful woman, Sarah came up with an alternate plan. She would use her servant Hagar as a surrogate mother. Obviously Sarah felt deep inner conflict about this decision, for when Abraham got Hagar pregnant, Sarah mistreated her and sent her away. Hagar returned, but Sarah's jealousy persisted. She would ultimately drive both mother and son into the desert.

Meanwhile, God kept repeating the amazing promise that Sarah would become the mother of a nation. At one point, Abraham fell face down and laughed incredulously at the notion. Sarah cackled too. But the joke turned on them both when old Sarah finally became pregnant. After all her years of waiting, her longings were fulfilled.

"God has brought me laughter," Sarah said when her son was born (21:6). It was a wonderful pun; in obedience to God (17:19), Abraham named his son Isaac, which means "he laughs" in Hebrew.

## Life Questions

When a person has deep longings that seem impossible to fulfill, what should he or she do?

**100** PEOPLE YOU SHOULD KNOW

<sup>13</sup>Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ <sup>14</sup>Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

<sup>15</sup>Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, “I did not laugh.”

But he said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

### Abraham Pleads for Sodom

<sup>16</sup>When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. <sup>17</sup>Then the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? <sup>18</sup>Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. <sup>19</sup>For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

## 18:18 The Gospel to Abraham

God pronounced here (and in several other places) that all nations on earth would be blessed through Abraham. About two thousand years later the apostle Paul would refer to this passage to illustrate how God reached out through Jews to non-Jews with the message of Christianity; he wrote that God had “announced the gospel in advance to Abraham” (Galatians 3:8).

<sup>20</sup>Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous <sup>21</sup>that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”

<sup>22</sup>The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. <sup>23</sup>Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup>What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare<sup>c</sup> the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? <sup>25</sup>Far be it from you to do such a thing — to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

<sup>26</sup>The LORD said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

<sup>27</sup>Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, <sup>28</sup>what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?”

“If I find forty-five there,” he said, “I will not destroy it.”

<sup>29</sup>Once again he spoke to him, “What if only forty are found there?”

He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.”

<sup>30</sup>Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?”

He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

<sup>31</sup>Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?”

He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.”

<sup>32</sup>Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?”

He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”

<sup>33</sup>When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

### Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

**19** The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. <sup>2</sup>“My lords,” he said, “please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.”

“No,” they answered, “we will spend the night in the square.”

<sup>3</sup>But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. <sup>4</sup>Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom — both young and old — surrounded the house. <sup>5</sup>They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.”

<sup>6</sup>Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him <sup>7</sup>and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing. <sup>8</sup>Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything

<sup>a</sup> 18 Or will use his name in blessings (see 48:20)

<sup>b</sup> 22 Masoretic Text; an ancient Hebrew scribal tradition but the LORD remained standing before Abraham

<sup>c</sup> 24 Or forgive; also in verse 26

## 19:1 A Man of Substance

The angels found Lot in the gateway to Sodom — a fact loaded with significance. Traditionally, city fathers gathered in the gateway to make important decisions. Lot's presence suggests that he had become "one of them" during his time in Sodom, which may explain why he struggled against leaving.

to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof."

<sup>9</sup>"Get out of our way," they replied. "This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.

<sup>10</sup>But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. <sup>11</sup>Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.

<sup>12</sup>The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here — sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, <sup>13</sup>because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."

<sup>14</sup>So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry<sup>a</sup> his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

<sup>15</sup>With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished."

<sup>16</sup>When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them. <sup>17</sup>As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!"

<sup>18</sup>But Lot said to them, "No, my lords, <sup>b</sup> please! <sup>19</sup>Your<sup>c</sup> servant has found favor in your<sup>c</sup> eyes, and you<sup>c</sup> have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I'll die. <sup>20</sup>Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it — it is very small, isn't it? Then my life will be spared."

<sup>21</sup>He said to him, "Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you

speak of. <sup>22</sup>But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it." (That is why the town was called Zoar.<sup>d</sup>)

<sup>23</sup>By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. <sup>24</sup>Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah — from the LORD out of the heavens. <sup>25</sup>Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities — and also the vegetation in the land. <sup>26</sup>But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

<sup>27</sup>Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD. <sup>28</sup>He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.

<sup>29</sup>So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

## Lot and His Daughters

<sup>30</sup>Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave. <sup>31</sup>One day the older daughter said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is no man around here to give us children — as is the custom all over the earth. <sup>32</sup>Let's get our father to drink wine and then sleep with him and preserve our family line through our father."

<sup>33</sup>That night they got their father to drink wine, and the older daughter went in and slept with him. He was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up.

<sup>34</sup>The next day the older daughter said to the younger, "Last night I slept with my father. Let's get him to drink wine again tonight, and you go in and sleep with him so we can preserve our family line through our father." <sup>35</sup>So they got

<sup>a</sup> 14 Or were married to    <sup>b</sup> 18 Or No, Lord; or No, my lord  
<sup>c</sup> 19 The Hebrew is singular.    <sup>d</sup> 22 Zoar means small.

## 19:26 Don't Look Back

Lot and his family found it hard to leave their adopted home of Sodom, despite its immorality. Angel messengers warned them to hurry, to not even stop to look back. When Lot's wife disobeyed, she turned into a pillar of salt — perhaps caught in volcanic explosions that engulfed Sodom. For this reason she has become a symbol of indecision. Jesus urged his followers to remember her example when their time of trouble came (see Luke 17:32).

their father to drink wine that night also, and the younger daughter went in and slept with him. Again he was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up.

<sup>36</sup>So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. <sup>37</sup>The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab<sup>a</sup>; he is the father of the Moabites of today. <sup>38</sup>The younger daughter also had a son, and she named him Ben-Ammi<sup>b</sup>; he is the father of the Ammonites<sup>c</sup> of today.

### Abraham and Abimelek

**20** Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, <sup>2</sup>and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.

<sup>3</sup>But God came to Abimelek in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman."

<sup>4</sup>Now Abimelek had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? <sup>5</sup>Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands."

<sup>6</sup>Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That

## 19:36 Family Quarrels

Lot's determination to enjoy life in Sodom ended tragically here, in drunken incest. The sons born out of that sinful union founded the family-nations of Moab and Ammon, which for centuries made war against their distant relatives in Israel and tempted them to sin.

is why I did not let you touch her. <sup>7</sup>Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die."

<sup>8</sup>Early the next morning Abimelek summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid. <sup>9</sup>Then Abimelek called Abraham in and said, "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should never be done." <sup>10</sup>And Abimelek asked Abraham, "What was your reason for doing this?"

<sup>a</sup> 37 Moab sounds like the Hebrew for from father.

<sup>b</sup> 38 Ben-Ammi means son of my father's people.

<sup>c</sup> 38 Hebrew Bene-Ammon

## GUIDED TOUR • GENESIS 19

### A CATASTROPHE SENT FROM GOD: GOD'S PATIENCE RUNS OUT

#### 19:12 – 13

*"Do you have anyone else here — sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, because we are going to destroy this place."*

This chapter shows what Abraham confronts in his efforts to found a new and godly nation. His own nephew lives in the city of Sodom, a sordid place that looks on visiting strangers — angels, as it turns out — as prime targets for gang rape. Sexual violence is just one of Sodom's problems. Ezekiel 16:49 describes the people of Sodom as "arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they [did] not help the poor and needy."

Despite Sodom's woeful condition, God agrees to spare the city if he could find a mere ten righteous people there. But when God ends his negotiation with Abraham, God steps in with direct punishment — not to destroy the whole world, but to wipe out two centers of evil.

### Did God Do It?

Should a catastrophe be read as a punishment from God? Do floods, famines and earthquakes come as a result of God's anger? The Bible's answer: Sometimes, and sometimes not. In Genesis, some catastrophes seem to "just happen" — they are neither punishments nor warnings, though God uses them to advance his plans. These include several famines (such as the one that brought Joseph to power in chapter 41), a war (chapter 14) and a rape (chapter 34).

A few catastrophes, however, God takes full credit for, such as the one at Sodom and Gomorrah. As

<sup>11</sup>Abraham replied, “I said to myself, ‘There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.’ <sup>12</sup>Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. <sup>13</sup>And when God had me wander from my father’s household, I said to her, ‘This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, ‘He is my brother.’”

<sup>14</sup>Then Abimelek brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. <sup>15</sup>And Abimelek said, “My land is before you; live wherever you like.”

<sup>16</sup>To Sarah he said, “I am giving your brother a thousand shekels<sup>a</sup> of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated.”

<sup>17</sup>Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again, <sup>18</sup>for the LORD had kept all the women in Abimelek’s household from conceiving because of Abraham’s wife Sarah.

### The Birth of Isaac

**21** Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. <sup>2</sup>Sarah became pregnant and

bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. <sup>3</sup>Abraham gave the name Isaac<sup>b</sup> to the son Sarah bore him. <sup>4</sup>When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. <sup>5</sup>Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

<sup>6</sup>Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” <sup>7</sup>And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

### Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away

<sup>8</sup>The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. <sup>9</sup>But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, <sup>10</sup>and she said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”

<sup>11</sup>The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. <sup>12</sup>But God said to him, “Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah

<sup>a</sup> 16 That is, about 25 pounds or about 12 kilograms

<sup>b</sup> 3 Isaac means *he laughs*.

*Continued from page 23*

usual, the Bible provides very few scientific facts about the destruction. Was it a volcanic eruption? The Bible doesn’t say, and the area, now apparently at the bottom of the Dead Sea, does not lend itself to archaeological investigation. The book of Genesis stresses not *how* it happened, but *why*.

## A Lesson Not Learned

Years earlier Abraham had refused to accept a well-earned reward from the government of Sodom, wanting nothing to do with such a society (14:21–24). But Lot chose the path of prosperity, the easy and successful life on the fertile plain nearby. He gets so entangled with life in Sodom that he hesitates to leave until it is nearly too late. He is the perfect example of a man who, excessively tangled in a corrupt system, cannot bear to leave it behind.

Jesus later uses the example of Sodom and Gomorrah as a warning to people who see his miracles but refuse to repent (see Matthew 11:24). God may not always intervene so spectacularly to punish sin, but he never approves it and he won’t tolerate it forever.

## Life Questions

What practices common to our society do you think God considers intolerable?

*To continue the Guided Tour reading plan, turn to page 31.*

*You can find the overall plan on pages xi–xiii.*

tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring<sup>a</sup> will be reckoned. <sup>13</sup>I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring.”

<sup>14</sup>Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

<sup>15</sup>When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. <sup>16</sup>Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, “I cannot watch the boy die.” And as she sat there, she<sup>b</sup> began to sob.

<sup>17</sup>God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. <sup>18</sup>Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”

<sup>19</sup>Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

<sup>20</sup>God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. <sup>21</sup>While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

### The Treaty at Beersheba

<sup>22</sup>At that time Abimelek and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham, “God is with you in everything you do. <sup>23</sup>Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you now reside as a foreigner the same kindness I have shown to you.”

<sup>24</sup>Abraham said, “I swear it.”

<sup>25</sup>Then Abraham complained to Abimelek about a well of water that Abimelek’s servants had seized. <sup>26</sup>But Abimelek said, “I don’t know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today.”

<sup>27</sup>So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelek, and the two men made a treaty. <sup>28</sup>Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock, <sup>29</sup>and Abimelek asked Abraham, “What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?”

<sup>30</sup>He replied, “Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well.”

<sup>31</sup>So that place was called Beersheba,<sup>c</sup> because the two men swore an oath there.

<sup>a</sup> 12 Or seed    <sup>b</sup> 16 Hebrew; Septuagint the child

<sup>c</sup> 31 Beersheba can mean well of seven and well of the oath.

## 100 PEOPLE YOU SHOULD KNOW

### ISAAC

#### An Ordinary Person

Isaac spent his life surrounded by strong people. His father, Abraham, was a giant of faith who uprooted his family at God’s call and moved to a far-off land. Isaac married a strong-willed woman, Rebekah, who dominated him and sometimes manipulated him to get her way. One of Isaac’s sons, Jacob, grew up to become a major figure of the Old Testament, father of the 12 tribes of Israel.

For all that strength around him, Isaac was a rather ordinary, almost passive person. Maybe it was because his parents had dreamed of his birth for so long that they sheltered him, their only child. Maybe his personality was formed in reaction to all those other powerful figures. Regardless, the Bible portrays Isaac as a person who fit into other people’s plans. Even when his father led him up a mountain to sacrifice him to God, Isaac did not protest or rebel (chapter 22).

When famine drove Isaac to a foreign land, he lied about his relationship with Rebekah rather than risk a conflict with the local king. When his herdsmen bickered with other shepherds over water rights, Isaac simply moved on, avoiding a fight. In Isaac’s old age, when his grown sons Jacob and Esau quarreled, Isaac seemed powerless to stop them. Instead of sorting out the details and resolving the feud, his inaction sent Jacob away.

Despite his weaknesses, Isaac is counted among the three famous patriarchs of Old Testament faith: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In bringing blessings to the entire world, God uses all kinds — even quiet, ordinary people.

### Life Questions

Think of an organization or cause you consider important. How many of those involved could be described as “ordinary people”? What do they contribute?

<sup>32</sup>After the treaty had been made at Beersheba, Abimelek and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of the Philistines. <sup>33</sup>Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Eternal God. <sup>34</sup>And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

### Abraham Tested

**22** Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

<sup>2</sup>Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love — Isaac — and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

## GUIDED TOUR • GENESIS 22

*Continued from page 29*

### FINAL EXAM: ABRAHAM'S ULTIMATE TEST OF FAITH

**22:2** *Then God said, “Take your son, your only son whom you love — Isaac — and go to the region of Moriah.”*

Abraham, a man renowned for his faith, does not come by that faith easily. Although God reveals to Abraham his overall plan for the future, the realization of that plan includes many bumps and pitfalls along the way.

Originally God tells Abraham to claim the land of Canaan as his own. But upon his arrival there, he finds the land so drought-stricken and its people so famished that he flees with his family to Egypt. There he fails a test of faith by lying about his wife to save his own skin (chapter 12).

God also promises Abraham many descendants, and that too leads to a crisis of faith. Nothing gives Abraham more delight than dreams of a tent filled with the sounds of children — his children — at play. But is that promise only a cruel joke? At age 85, Abraham gives up on that promise and has sex with a female servant. At least he will have one child he can call his own. At age 99, when he hears God confirm the original promise, Abraham laughs in God's face. Sarah pregnant at 90?

### What God Wants

What kind of game is God playing? Whatever does God want? God wants faith, the Bible says, which means complete trust, regardless of the odds. And so Abraham finally learns what it means to have faith. Against all odds, a son is born to Abraham and Sarah, fulfilling God's promise. They never live to see tents filled with happy children or their descendants multiply like the stars in the sky. But they do have one beloved son whom they name Isaac, or “laughter,” as if to remind them of the very absurdity, the *miracle*, of parenthood in their old age.

Now God presents a final test of faith, a trial so severe that it makes all the others seem like kindergarten games. The Bible makes it clear that God does not intend to let Abraham go through with his plan of child sacrifice. In fact, years later, when the Israelites actually commit infant sacrifice, God calls it “something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind” (Jeremiah 19:5). All along, God intends to provide another sacrifice: a ram caught by its horns in a thicket.

Nevertheless, Abraham does not know these things as he climbs the steep mountain with his only son. (This same mountain later becomes home to Jerusalem, the place where God provides his only Son as the final sacrifice for all people.) Abraham must blindly follow God's orders. Too many times he has doubted God. This time he determines to obey, no matter what. It has taken more than a hundred years, but Abraham has finally learned to trust God. This scene, above all others, shows how he acquired his reputation as a man of faith.

### Life Questions

What is the hardest test of faith you have ever been through? How has God been teaching you that you can trust him?

*To continue the Guided Tour reading plan, turn to page 38.  
You can find the overall plan on pages xi–xiii.*

<sup>3</sup>Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. <sup>4</sup>On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. <sup>5</sup>He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

<sup>6</sup>Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, <sup>7</sup>Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

<sup>8</sup>Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

<sup>9</sup>When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup>Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. <sup>11</sup>But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

<sup>12</sup>“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

<sup>13</sup>Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram<sup>a</sup> caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. <sup>14</sup>So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

<sup>15</sup>The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time <sup>16</sup>and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup>I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, <sup>18</sup>and through your offspring<sup>b</sup> all nations on earth will be blessed,<sup>c</sup> because you have obeyed me.”

<sup>19</sup>Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

### Nahor's Sons

<sup>20</sup>Some time later Abraham was told, “Milkah is also a mother; she has borne sons to your brother Nahor: <sup>21</sup>Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother,

Kemuel (the father of Aram), <sup>22</sup>Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel.” <sup>23</sup>Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. Milkah bore these eight sons to Abraham’s brother Nahor. <sup>24</sup>His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also had sons: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maakah.

### The Death of Sarah

**23** Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. <sup>2</sup>She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.

<sup>3</sup>Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites.<sup>d</sup> He said, “I am a foreigner and stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead.”

<sup>5</sup>The Hittites replied to Abraham, “Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead.”

<sup>7</sup>Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites. <sup>8</sup>He said to them, “If you are willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron son of Zohar on my behalf <sup>9</sup>so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and is at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you.”

<sup>10</sup>Ephron the Hittite was sitting among his people and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of his city. <sup>11</sup>“No, my lord,” he said. “Listen to me; I give<sup>e</sup> you the field, and I give<sup>e</sup> you the cave that is in it. I give<sup>e</sup> it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead.”

<sup>12</sup>Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land <sup>13</sup>and he said to Ephron in their hearing, “Listen to me, if you will. I will pay the price of the field. Accept it from me so I can bury my dead there.”

<sup>14</sup>Ephron answered Abraham, <sup>15</sup>“Listen to me, my lord; the land is worth four hundred shekels<sup>f</sup> of silver, but what is that between you and me? Bury your dead.”

<sup>16</sup>Abraham agreed to Ephron’s terms and weighed out for him the price he had named in the hearing of the Hittites: four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weight current among the merchants.

<sup>a</sup> <sup>13</sup> Many manuscripts of the Masoretic Text, Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint and Syriac; most manuscripts of the Masoretic Text a ram behind him

<sup>b</sup> <sup>18</sup> Or seed <sup>c</sup> <sup>18</sup> Or and all nations on earth will use the name of your offspring in blessings (see 48:20)

<sup>d</sup> <sup>3</sup> Or the descendants of Heth; also in verses 5, 7, 10, 16, 18 and 20 <sup>e</sup> <sup>11</sup> Or sell <sup>f</sup> <sup>15</sup> That is, about 10 pounds or about 4.6 kilograms

# PROMISES, PROMISES

God promised to give Abraham all that he longed for ... and more

**22:18** *“Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”*

The workings of the human heart haven't changed much in 4,000 years. The longing for children and the desire for land still surge up with surprising emotional power.

Consider the estimated seven million American women — one in eight between the ages of 15 and 44 — who are unable to have children. For many of them, this brings deep anguish. Or think about the people who work double shifts, sacrificing their free time in order to own, rather than rent, a home.

Abraham would have understood. When God wanted his attention, he promised Abraham land and more sons than he could count. To a Babylonian emigrant, 75 years old and childless, who owned nothing but his tents and animals, the promises sounded wonderful. In fact, they sounded impossible. Yet, because God himself made the promise, Abraham “believed the LORD, and [God] credited it to him as righteousness” (15:6).

For the God who had created the heavens and the earth, making good on the promises would have been a snap. But God did not make it easy for Abraham. Not until 25 years later, when Abraham was 100, did the promise of a son come true. Then, incredibly, God told Abraham to make a human sacrifice of his young son.

Astonishingly, Abraham followed God's orders. And God gave him back his son.

## Far from Fulfilled

When Abraham died, God's promises to him were far from fully realized. Abraham had only that one son. He lived in a tent until his death, and the only permanent structures he had built were altars erected to worship the God who had made all those promises.

God, having promised Abraham everything a man of that time could want, apparently wanted him to think even bigger thoughts. Along with the promises of offspring and land, God slipped in some other words: “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (12:3). God wanted to bless not only Abraham, but also the whole world. Thousands of years later, in the time of Jesus, the full meaning of those words would become clear (see Galatians 3:6–9, 16–18).

## Life Questions

What kind of promises does God make today? What longings does he fulfill?