

## LESSON TWO:

# God Centers on One Family

## Genesis 4-50

### Introduction:

God started with just one family, Adam and Eve, and at the end of Genesis, we see still, in focus, just one family, (that of Abraham and his seed) although we are conscious of a numerous population elsewhere in the world of that day. This lesson shows us how God, refusing to be stymied by the failures of men, continued to move on toward the establishing of His people on earth, in the midst of hostile sinners. They were God's beachhead in the ultimate conquest of a people without number — to be His holy people.

It is easy to remember the content of the rest of Genesis as we remember just a few events and personalities:

1. The two major families of men (4-6):  
(the righteous and the unrighteous)
2. The family of Noah (7-11):  
(saved by grace)
3. The family of Abraham (12-24):  
(growth in faith)
4. The family of Jacob through Isaac (25-50):  
(the humbling of pride)

We see here that the Lord who created man, male and female, and established *the family*, continued to show His concern for the families of mankind, culminating in *one particular* family, that of Abraham, as his seed went down to Egypt for 400 years of moulding and preparation for their greater mission to come. (This is the whole length of time since the promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:13; c.f. Gal 3:17).

### What Do We Find Here?

## GENESIS FOUR TO SIX:

### The Two Major Families of Men

Immediately, we are conscious of the existence of two *kinds of men* after the fall: those

who are right with God by their faith and those who are rebellious sinners against God and God's children.

We have been prepared for this by Genesis 3:15, which foretold the existence of two kinds of seed: the seed of the woman (*the righteous*) and the seed of the serpent (*the unrighteous*). These two are clearly represented in chapter four in the persons of Cain (the unrighteous) and Abel (his righteous brother). The enmity which God predicted would exist between the two seed is also very obvious here. These concepts (two seeds and the enmity between them) are carried throughout Scripture. Jesus is very aware of this as He talks to the Pharisees (John 8:42-44; see also 1 John 3:8-10).

The New Testament also helps us to see that Cain was of the evil one (1 John 3:12) while Abel was saved by his faith (Heb. 11:4). In short, the difference between the two was not merely in that one did well and one did not, but in that one did what he did out of a heart of faith while the other did not.

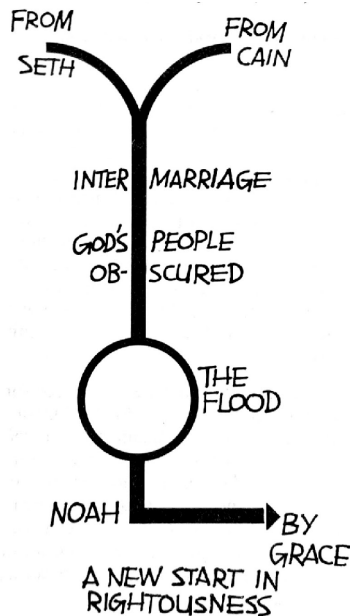
*Cain's descendants* are then traced for several generations (4:16-24) illustrating that the seed of Satan, though evil, nevertheless *retained the capacity to do many marvelous things* and were the inventors of most things useful to man: culture, cities, arts, industry, poetry. But they turned all things to their own sinful uses, as Lamech's evil poetry shows us (4:23, 24).

The end of the chapter leaves us hope, however, as we are told of God's gift of Seth, through whom worshippers of God in faith came to be numbered on earth (4:25-26).

But even *the descendants of Seth* were not without sin. Being born of Adam, they were in his image (sinful). We call this doctrine *original sin* (5:3). Our Confession of Faith takes note of this (Ch. 111). Among those descendants were some bright spots of faith, such as Enoch who walked with God (v. 21-24; see Eph. 1:4 — "in God's presence") and Noah who would be a comfort to

God's people as an example of a child of God's grace (5:29; 6:8).

Regretfully, the seeds of righteousness did not continue to produce righteousness. They *intermarried with the seeds of unrighteousness* (unbelievers) and the result was a generation mighty and famous, but totally evil (6:2-5).



God would not tolerate such abandon of His will that totally obliterated the identity of God's seed on earth; so *He purposed to destroy the world, while saving Noah by His grace* (6:7, 8). Noah responded to the grace of God by faith and good works (6:9-22). Paul shows that this is the way it must be with everyone who is saved, since by our own works none of us is justified (seen as righteous by God) (Eph. 2:8, 9, 10). We all enter God's family by God's grace alone!

## GENESIS SEVEN TO ELEVEN:

### The Family of Noah

God was as good as His word in saving Noah *and* his family, though one child, Ham, was evidently not a believer. As we noted in the first lesson, the reservoirs of water stored up at creation were now released against mankind so that in the greatest upheaval the earth has known since

creation, *the world that then was was destroyed* (7:11, 12). There can be little doubt that the Scripture teaches a *total flood* covering the whole earth, not a local flood (7: 19). It was a flood whose source was water with which we have nothing to compare today — not simply rain, but reservoirs of water from above and below — sufficient totally to change the world in which man lived.

As God had opened the sources of the flood, so He closed them (8:2). And because God remembered Noah and his family (v. 1), Noah reciprocated in appropriate gratitude and worshipped the Lord by a sacrifice pleasing to God (8:20-21). However, man *was not really changed in his heart by the flood*. It would take more than a flood of judgment to change the hearts of men (v. 21).

The next three chapters show us how, indeed, the hearts of men were not changed by the flood and how, even Noah, a righteous man, could nevertheless fall into sin and bring sorrow on his own household.

Noah's sin of drunkenness led to the further sin of his son, Ham, who, in an impure heart, ridiculed his father's nakedness, showing it off to his brothers (9:22). The curse in verses 25-27, is more *a prophecy* having to do with the *future of his sons* and their descendants, in accord with our awareness already of the existence of two seeds. Evidently, Noah could see in his own family *the potential for all humanity* to be divided into three categories: those who were God's children (Shem); those who were Satan's children (Ham/Canaan); and those out of the sinners who would be brought into the family of God ("dwell in the tents of Shem") (Japheth).

See the map to see some idea of how the civilizations of mankind developed in the ancient Near East.

The final chapter in this section tells of *man's continuing rebellion against God* as he tried his great works without any thought of God (11:3,

4). But God, foreordaining the birth of Abram, a citizen of that same Mesopotamia where the tower had been built — but more importantly, a future citizen of God’s Kingdom — would not allow men to succeed in shutting God out of their destiny.

## **GENESIS TWELVE TO TWENTY- FOUR:**

### **The Family of Abraham**

We must remember that by *the time of Abraham’s appearance* on the scene in Mesopotamia, *his ancestors* for some time had been *worshippers of pagan gods*. We learn this in Joshua 24:2. So when we are told that Abraham was called by the Lord to leave his country and family, we can see why it was necessary. Like Noah, Abraham was a child of God’s grace, first being called by God; then, by faith engendered through that Word of God, he responded obediently to the call of God. This is really how all men are saved — by God’s initiative — as He not only calls us but also through the Word works faith in our hearts so that we are able to respond to His call.

*God separated to Himself one man and his family to be holy*, (belonging fully to the Lord) from all the people on earth. But at the same time, the Lord had in view *the saving of many people* out of all the earth, through this one family. That, in essence, is the story of the Bible. It is an evangelistic story, involving not only the salvation of one family and one people, but of a whole multitude of people from the whole earth for God’s own glory. It is also therefore a *missionary* story that is still going on in the history of the world today (Gen. 12:2, 3).

*Abraham* was someone special in the plan of God. He was to be an example to the faithful child of God. Therefore, there is much in these chapters for us through study of Abraham’s growth in faith. We can only outline that growth in faith briefly now; later, in subsequent more detailed study, we shall look more closely at Abraham’s faith and what it means to us today.

1. *Abraham’s faith began as a result of God’s grace to him*, just as does our own (Heb. 11:8; see too Eph. 2:8, 9). The evidence of his faith is seen in his obedience to God and worship of God (12:4, 7).
2. *Abraham’s faith did not begin as a strong faith, but had to be nurtured*, being surrounded by great inconsistencies at the beginning. We see this in chapter 12 when Abraham evidently at first did not trust the Lord to protect him and instead was willing to sacrifice his wife’s honor for his own safety’s sake.
3. *Abraham’s faith grew as he learned to seek not to live selfishly but to show concern for the needs of others*. We see this in chapter 13. Abraham gave to his nephew, Lot, the choice of places to dwell, taking the leftovers for himself.
4. *Abraham’s faith, as it grew, led him to give increasing glory to God for all the blessings of his life*. This is seen in chapter 14. As Abraham returned to Sodom, the conquering hero, with all the property and people, the king of Sodom sought to glorify him and reward Abraham richly as the world does its heroes. But the Lord sent Melchizedek, to remind Abraham that to God belonged the glory for his victory that day (14:18-20). Abraham responded by glorifying God, refusing the rewards of men, and instead gave a tithe of all he already possessed to the Lord, through Melchizedek.
5. *In chapter 15, the focus is on Abraham’s faith as it pertained to his desire for a child and to God’s promise to give to him a child to be his heir*. The sixth verse tells the relationship between faith and right. ‘eousness: without faith there can be no righteousness (right standing with God). This verse became a key verse which Paul later used to develop the great doctrine of justification (being made righteous) by faith alone (Rom. 4:3ff; Gal. 3:6ff).
6. *Chapters 16 and 17 are a lesson in the importance of walking always in faith*. When

Abraham did not do so and became impatient with God's delay to give him a son, he and Sarah tried to have the child in the way the customs of the world allowed in that day (16:1, 2). This resulted in great tragedy for all concerned. When Abraham did not act in faith, sorrow followed. This is why the Lord called him again to walk before the Lord and to strive for that goal of perfection which the Lord views as the goal for all of His children (17:1).

7. *In the next chapter, 18, the Lord showed to Abraham just what God's goal for his seed was: "that they should keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice."* (18:19). Here, for the first time, the two words "righteousness" and "justice" are used together. They are repeated together hereafter throughout Scripture as the summation of God's will for His people. Once more, the family and the home are seen in their proper perspective in God's plan.
8. *Chapter 20 shows that faith does not grow steadily, ever upward; there are setbacks in the lives of all of God's children, there were also in Abraham's life.*
9. *But the Lord is faithful and dependable.* That is why our faith must be anchored in Him. As He promised to Abraham, so He did (21:1). Through this, Abraham understood that God was everlasting and therefore, always dependable (21:33).
10. *It was now time for that strong faith to be tested.* This we are told in chapter 22. In essence, here, Abraham was called upon to entrust his son, Isaac, his most precious gift from God, totally into the hands of the Lord. In the New Testament we are told that he did this in faith, believing in God's power to raise Isaac from the dead if need be (Heb. 11:17-19).

That day, Abraham became the *first evangelist*, as he spoke prophetically that God would provide the lamb for the burnt-offering, meaning that whatever was needed for Isaac's (and

our) redemption, God would supply (22:8). Later, John the Baptist, as the introducer of Jesus to mankind in history, pointed to Christ, seemingly with the words of Abraham in mind: "Behold, the Lamb of God" (John 1:36).

As the experiences of Abraham began, so they closed. Once more the promise to him was that *through his seed all nations* on earth would be *blessed* (22:18); and in addition, in accord with Genesis 3:15, his seed would conquer the seed of the enemy in the end (v. 17).

As for *Lot*, his bad choice of Sodom as a place to live, while not eliminating him personally from the family of God (2 Pt. 2:7), did result in his family and descendants being cut off from the family of God (chapter 18). And *Ishmael*, not being a child of promise, but of human works alone, did receive an earthly inheritance but not a place in God's family (Gal. 4:23, 29). His descendants too became members of the pagan and unbelieving society surrounding Abraham's family.

It was an awareness of this ever-growing, pagan, godless society surrounding Abraham, the believer, that led him to stake a claim, as it were, for his seed after him, as he bought the burial ground for Sarah in the hope that this would one day belong to his heirs (ch. 23). For the same reason, *Abraham also saw to it*, before he died, that Isaac should *marry one of his own people*, back in Mesopotamia, rather than a pagan Canaanite, so great was his own sense of the importance of the family in the plan of God. He strove for a pure seed uncontaminated by paganism, in so far as he could (ch. 24).

## **GENESIS TWENTY-FIVE TO FIFTY:**

### **The Family of Jacob through Isaac**

*Isaac* is something *like a valley* between two great mountain peaks. In personality he stands out far less than do Abraham and Jacob, his son. Nevertheless, he is a vital link in God's plan to have a faithful family. Isaac was first known as the son of

Abraham and then later as the father of Jacob, having little distinction in his own right.

We note, however, the consciousness in Isaac as it was in his father, of the importance of having a seed — a family — to serve the Lord. Like Sarah, Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, was to wait upon the Lord for that seed of promise (25:19f).

We are also immediately conscious of the *tension of two kinds of people being born from Isaac and Rebekah*; the seed of Satan and the seed of God (25:23). The choice had been God's before the two were even born; but early, their basically different natures are evident to us (Mal. 1:2,3; Romans 9:6-13). In the events recorded for us in the latter part of chapter 25 (vs. 27-34), Esau reveals a thoroughly secular nature while Jacob, far from admirable, nevertheless, is aware of the importance of his spiritual heritage through Abraham and Isaac. Hebrews 12:16, 17, calls Esau profane, a thoroughly worldly man. He never changed from this. It eliminated him finally from any part in the family of God through Abraham and Isaac.

While Jacob continued to be concerned for the blessings of Abraham, Esau continued to show himself profane, even marrying pagan wives which Abraham forbade him to do (26:34, 35).

*Jacob's conduct* in chapter 27 *cannot be defended*. He proved to be a liar and a blasphemer and as such, he was not acceptable to God as he was. But it is just that kind of material that the Lord always has to work with, even as He brought us from spiritual death to newness of life, of which Paul reminds us in Ephesians 2:1-3. God did not give up on Jacob, even as He has not given up on us either. The Lord therefore brought about the humbling of Jacob, thus making that sinner into a saint.

When Jacob, as a result of his evil deeds, fled from his brother Esau, who still showed his profaneness and kinship with Cain in wishing to kill his brother (27:41), Jacob went away still a proud

and vain man. But God had His eye on Jacob, both to humble him and then to lift him up (ch. 28).

*Jacob* entered into the life and family of his uncle Laban with *the same pride and vanity* with which he had departed from Canaan. He was now in upper Mesopotamia which we can observe on our map as Paddan-Aram. He came there with his bag full of tricks and deceptions, expecting to outwit Laban as he had his brother Esau and his father Isaac. But Laban was more than a match (29:21-27).

Later Jacob would testify that *had God not helped him*, Laban would have continued to cheat and steal from Jacob even as Jacob had before cheated and stolen from his brother, Esau (31:9, 1. 38-42). What we see happening in these 1' twenty years of Jacob's humbling is that more and more he trusts the Lord and less and less trusts in his own trickery to get him what he needs.

In the meantime, the Lord blessed Jacob with a large family of boys so that as he left Laban after twenty years, he had eleven sons and at least one daughter.

Jacob was now faced with his brother Esau who was, Jacob feared, still angry and still bent on killing him. Caught between two enemies: Laban and Esau, *Jacob was finally brought to his knees* in humble contrition before the Lord (32:9-12). God heard that prayer and delivered Jacob, bringing him safely back to his homeland. As with Jacob, so with us. We are all proud sinners until humbled by the Lord. It is only as He humbles each of us that we can be fit for heaven and ready for faith in the Lord. It is to this that our Lord later addresses Himself when, through Isaiah, He says: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite" (Isa. 57:15).

*The dismissal of the family of Esau* is given in the statistical chapter 36, and from that point all attention is given to the family of Jacob. The earliest picture we have of the family, when the sons were mostly young men, is far from a pretty picture

(37:2-11). We find Jacob unwisely playing favorites among his sons, giving most gifts and attention to Joseph. From Jacob's own experience, when *his* father had favored Esau to Jacob's own hurt, Jacob, of all people, ought to have known to avoid favoritism among the children in one family. It provoked jealousy among Joseph's brothers which was not really helped by Joseph's own tattling and dream-interpreting. There was no innocent party here. *All were vain, jealous, proud and sinful.*

*Joseph was humbled* by being sold into slavery and having to endure prison life for many years, in which time he sought to glorify the Lord and grew greatly in spiritual strength. Judah was humbled by his own daughter-in-law, after he had sinned many times against God while marrying and living among the Canaanite pagans (ch. 38). Others of the brothers were also humbled in one way or the other.

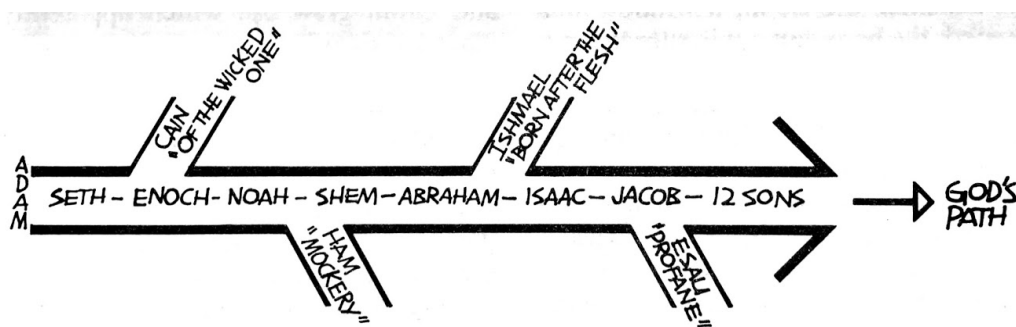
Judah and Joseph *gradually grew in spiritual stature* until they finally met in Egypt, each showing great strength spiritually as Judah, who had once been willing to sell Joseph into slavery was now willing to lay down his life for his brother Benjamin's sake, while Joseph, seeing the love of Judah, was himself moved with compassion toward all of his brothers and readily forgave their evils against him (Gen. 44:32-45:26). Indeed, Joseph saw all that happened to him as part of God's plan to preserve this family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from extinction (45:7, 8; 50:20,

In the end of the Book of Genesis, Jacob goes down to Egypt as God had long before foretold Abraham that his seed must do (Gen. 15:13, 14). *The closing scene* shows the family of Jacob, the descendants of Abraham by faith, drawn close together in love and mutual trust, *ministering to one another* (Gen. 50:15-21). As their father Jacob had been humbled, so had they. As he was lifted up by the tender arms of God, so were they. Now, *the people of God were a visible body* of some 70 souls (46:27; Ex. 1:5). They were, in effect, *one family*; and the basic family unit would always, in God's plan, be essential in the building of His church. But in Egypt they would grow into a nation of people who were preserved to serve the Lord.

Below, we see how the Lord, throughout this period, preserved His own, while others, descendants in the flesh, nevertheless, were not by faith joined to the people of God and thus went the way of the world. In the next lesson we shall consider how God redeemed and taught His people whom He had formed in the womb of Egypt.

### What Additional Information is Helpful?

Looking on the map, we note the area of Sumer in Mesopotamia, far to the south. It was here that the earliest culture developed, according to archaeologists, called the Sumerian culture. There is no evidence of where - this culture came from, but it was a very advanced culture as discovered by the archaeologists. Dates of that culture before 2400 are



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extremely vague and uncertain from the data now at

hand. The language, Sumerian, was a highly developed language, not rudimentary. All of this fits in quite well with the Biblical evidence that man's knowledge was great from the time of the fall on and did not develop slowly from rudimentary language and culture as many propose, but from a high level of intelligence from the beginning (see Gen. 4).

After the Sumerian culture, according to archaeologists, came the cultures of the Akkadians and the Babylonians, Semitic people akin to the Hebrews (see the chart on page 22). They, along with the Sumerians, preserved traditions of the flood which are similar to what we read in Scripture. The best preserved tradition of the flood is called the *Gilgamesh Epic*. In this account which is from more ancient versions, there are some similarities to the Biblical account: the flood was due to the anger of the god; the hero was ordered to build a boat and put on board seed of all living things; specific measurements for building the boat were given (it had six decks); after the flood, a window was opened; the hero sent out in succession a dove, a swallow and a raven; on dry ground, sacrifice was made; all outside the boat were killed. But there are significant dissimilarities as well: in the *Gilgamesh* account, the head god was against sparing any man but was tricked by the lesser gods and deceived; the storm lasted only 7 days and the source was only rain; not only the hero and his family but also much of the town was saved; and the gods were themselves frightened by the severity of the storm.

The similarities can be explained, as we noted in the first lesson, by the fact that sinful men retained some memory of the flood that destroyed all mankind except the family of Noah. However, the dissimilarities illustrate once again how sinful men, descendants of Noah's sons, paganized and corrupted the truth, putting all in the context of their pagan gods. Again, we see the necessity for an

infallible record given by God if men are to know the truth.

Ancient history knows of two great empires which grew up in the area of the Fertile Crescent: in Egypt and in Mesopotamia. This is quite similar to our Biblical knowledge which shows two major centers of men: Mesopotamia from which Abraham came and Egypt to which he momentarily went. Ancient history too sees Canaan in this time as a kind of corridor between the two empire centers, most undeveloped in civilization, with few exceptions. During most of the period of Genesis history, there are records of invasions from Mesopotamia and from Egypt into the area of Canaan or Palestine. The invasion recorded in Genesis 14 from Mesopotamia is one example.

Finally, from certain ancient writings in the area of Mesopotamia, specifically from Nuzi (see again the map on page 21) we learn of some customs of that part of the world, in which Abraham and Sarah grew up, which apparently played a significant part in their thinking and life. From Nuzi we learn that a man could adopt his servant as an heir if he had none naturally. If later natural children were born to him, they received the family gods. This was apparently Abraham's fear as expressed in Genesis 15, that since he had no son, his heritage and particularly his spiritual heritage would go to his servant whom he had adopted rather than to a natural son of his own flesh.

These same tablets also tell that when a wife did not bear, then the handmaid could be used to bear an heir for the husband. Furthermore, according to the custom, the child by the handmaid could not be sent away should a natural heir be borne later by the wife. We can see that Sarah and Abraham were following the customs of the world in which they had lived rather than walking in faith in the Lord as they made provision for an heir through Hagar. And what was not of faith was, for them, a sin. But Sarah, in insisting that Ishmael should be sent away, was violating the general

custom of that time. In doing so, she was being guided by the Lord who overruled the customs of men to work out His will.

Archaeologists have discovered thousands of statuettes of nude women in Palestine, evidently representative of the worship of the Canaanites which was perverse and corrupt. All indications are that they worshipped by going in to professional prostitutes, in their temples. No wonder Abraham did not wish his son to marry into such people and no wonder the Lord had determined to take this land away from its natives and give it to the seed of Abraham!

