

GENESIS - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
 - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. What picture of God would you have if the only evidence you had was the book of Genesis? Genesis is the only record we have for several millennia—one-half or more—of this world's history. Does this seem adequate?

In the book of Genesis we see God creating our world, warning our first parents of the danger of the deceiver, putting them out of the garden after they sinned, asking Noah to build an ark, preserving Noah and his family in that ark as He drowns the rest of humanity, picking out Abraham and his descendants to be His special representatives in the earth, and then working with Abraham's descendants despite their very human lives. While God felt it was necessary to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, before He did so, He discussed the matter with His friend Abraham. (Genesis 18)

The book starts with the most wonderful promise of a perfect world, "In the beginning God created..." and ends with the results of man's sins: "...in a coffin in Egypt." We have almost no external evidence by which to corroborate any of the events of the book of Genesis. Archaeology has found a lot of material which is not inconsistent with the accounts of Genesis but neither does archaeology positively confirm what we read in Genesis. It is important to note that we cannot disprove any part of Genesis from archaeology.

In Genesis God is not only the all-powerful Creator, but the One who sits down to discuss personal matters with Abraham. While Adam and Eve were excluded from the Garden of Eden on their first offense, Abraham and Sarah were still blessed with a child despite laughing at God's promise and then lying about it! (See Genesis 17:17; 18:10-15)

God miraculously preserved the family of Jacob by working against their schemes and blessing Joseph in the land of Egypt. Fortunately, at the time the rulers of Egypt were the Hyksos, "the Greek form of an Egyptian word meaning 'ruler(s) of foreign land(s),' i.e., of alien origin (Redford 1970), used to refer to non-natives who ruled over portions of Lower Egypt as the 15th Dynasty in the first half of the 2d millennium B.C." [*Anchor Bible Dictionary*] The Hyksos, whose language seems to suggest they came from western Asia, perhaps Amorites from Canaan or Phoenecians, apparently felt a close kinship with Joseph. Joseph in turn, was very God-like in his treatment of His brothers despite the terrible way in which they had treated him.

God began His work here on earth by creating the beautiful Garden of Eden and giving it to Adam and Eve. When their descendants became so evil that God was afraid of losing contact with the human race, he preserved Noah and his family to start over. It wasn't long before conditions seemed to be just as bad again and God had to pick out Abraham so He could work with him and his family. They were certainly not saints but their history serves as a lesson book for the rest of us.

“While this book tells stories about people, it is first and foremost an account of what God has done. It begins with the affirmation that God created the universe, and it ends with a promise that God will continue to show his concern for his people. Throughout the book the main character is God, who judges and punishes those who do wrong, leads and helps his people, and shapes their history. This ancient book was written to record the story of a people’s faith and to help keep that faith alive.” (GNB)

The name Genesis comes from Greek and means “beginnings” or “origins” and was the name assigned to this book by the Greek translators about 250 BC when it was first translated into the Greek from the original Hebrew. In Hebrew the book is called *Bereshith* which is the first word in the book and means “in the beginning”.

Some relatively recent scholars have contended that Moses could not have written the books we normally attribute to him. For a brief answer to those charges see the handout Genesis #3 entitled “**Who Wrote Genesis?**”

When you read Genesis what picture of God do you see as He deals with Adam, Noah, Abraham, etc.?

2. What kind of God would create Lucifer—and this earth—if He had foreknowledge of sin, the flood etc.? Why did He give Solomon wisdom, (1 Kings 3:5-9; 2 Chronicles 1:7-12; Matthew 12:42), and Samson strength? (Judges 13:25; 16:28)

God is not afraid to move ahead with His plans even when He knows in advance that everything is not going to work out just the way He would like to see it work out. To God, love and freedom, which are inseparable, are the essential principles by which He constantly works. While we believe that God has always had the power and authority to overrule the events of the universe to make things work out the way He wants them to, He refuses to create “robots” or to treat us as “robots”. (See handout Genesis #4 on “**Love**”). Thus God created all His creatures with the power to love Him or hate Him and spit in His face.

For freedom to work, we need to see not only the results of good choices but also the results of bad choices. God allows us to proceed and reap the consequences of our choices. The Bible discusses not only the lives of those who mostly did what is right, but also the lives of those who rebelled against God and lived lives which were mostly wasted. God intends that the story of this one rebellious planet will be preserved as a warning for all eternity against the hazards of rebellion and sin. So the consequences of both good and bad choices must be preserved in the record for eternity.

Would you prefer to live in a world or a universe without “love” or “freedom”? How does Satan feel about “love” and “freedom”? Would you be willing to give up some of your “freedom” in order to have a little more “security”?

3. What were Satan’s charges against God at the very beginning? (Compare Genesis 3:1-5; Job 1 & 2; Revelation 12:7-12; Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:1-6, 12-15) Do you think it is significant that this planet became the center of the great controversy almost immediately after it was created?

This planet has become the “Theater of the Universe”. (1 Corinthians 4:9) Satan has believed and taught that his way is superior to God’s way. He has accused God of being a liar, a tyrant, an arbitrary, severe, vengeful, unforgiving and exacting Ruler and Judge. After war

broke out in heaven (Revelation 12:7-12) Satan could not remain in heaven and he ended up here on planet earth. When God decided to create “a new and distinct order” of beings (1BC 1081; RH2/11/1902; SDG7) to populate this earth, Satan demanded to be given opportunity to invite (tempt) them to join his side in rebellion against God. God created this earth in a such a way as to answer many of Satan’s accusations even before he had a chance to speak them to our first parents. But when they sinned God set about to make sure that this “sin experiment” would never happen again. God has worked very hard and even been willing to come and live among us and give His life to answer all of Satan’s accusations and provide a permanent and convincing proof that Satan’s way leads only to unhappiness and destruction.

We chose to become the “guinea pigs” in this “sin experiment”. The entire universe is watching to see what the final outcome will be. God has won His case (Romans 4:3) but He is still having a very difficult time reaching and convincing us of the rightness of His cause.

As perverse as it may seem, Satan down through the generations has used religion as the primary weapon against God! If Satan came out and identified himself and began to make accusations against God, most of us would probably reject his statements out of hand. Instead, he finds ways to get religious peoples to believe in his lies and promote them as “religious truth”. This makes it very difficult sometimes to decide who is telling us the truth.

Can you identify some “lies” about God that are believed as “gospel truth” by certain religious groups?

4. What does the creation story say about God? Does the story seem too childish or simple? Is this story more about geology or theology? (Genesis 1 & 2) What difference would it make? Why did God take seven days to create planet earth when He no doubt could have done it in an instant? When He had finished His work, He “rested.” If God doesn’t get tired what does this mean?

The book of Genesis is primarily a book about God. Even if God had told Moses using the language of heaven all the details of how He created our world in the beginning, Moses could not have told anyone else because there was no developed vocabulary to discuss such issues in Moses’ day! Thus the story of creation is intended not as a scientific treatise but a simple and beautiful account of God’s activities during that first week of our history. It is intended to provide only a brief overview of the “Who” of creation and not a discussion of the “how”.

When He was finished, God “rested” from His work, not because He was tired at all but simply because He was finished. The word “rested” here is the word used by a lawyer when he says, “I rest my case”, because he is finished. It is not the word for rest from wearisome toil.

Genesis tells us that our heritage goes back to the God of the universe. We are His sons and daughters. We are created in His image. He cares about us. We all are truly brothers and sisters, the children of one “Parent”. This should lead us to regard each other and our “Father” in very different terms than many do today. If we descended from a long line of one-celled creatures, salamanders, and apes, then our evolutionary roots would suggest that we should be constantly fighting for the best place, the best spouse (or spouses), and the “right” to dominate our peers. Which of these two “worlds” would you prefer to live in?

Does it matter to you that God is our heavenly “Parent”? If so, why?

5. Why did God put the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden near the tree of life? (Genesis 2:9; 3:3) Was that fair to Adam and Eve? To Satan? God said they would die if they ate of the tree (Genesis 2:17) and Satan said they wouldn't. Who appeared to be right? When did man first see that ultimate death that God had spoken about in Eden?

Placing the tree of knowledge in the garden of Eden was certainly not a simple test of our obedience as is often suggested. Sin had already caused war in heaven (Revelation 12:7-12) and now the devil was demanding equal access to the new creatures. God, realizing the hazard of that, told Satan that he could have access to them only at that one tree. He was not allowed to pursue them all around the garden, appearing in whatever attractive form he might choose to continually harass them. God limited him to that one tree, but at the same time placed that tree near the tree of life in the center of the garden where Adam and Eve would be able to see it every time they came to eat of the tree of life. Satan thus could not claim that God had hidden him off in some inaccessible corner of the garden where they would never see him, and God could rightly state that He was giving the devil adequate access to the new pair. Thus the tree of knowledge of good and evil was intended to be a protection for our first parents and not a test! God tried His best, within the limits of freedom to warn them about their wily foe. (See handout Genesis #5 on "**The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil**")

6. What was Eve's sin? What does her experience with the serpent tell us about our situation and what we need to be aware of? What would you understand is so bad about what she did? Whose sin was worse, Eve's or Adam's? (1 Timothy 2:14) Was God being unfairly harsh in this experience? Shouldn't we desire to be like God as Eve tried to be?

Eve's sin was not in trusting the serpent, but in distrusting God. She had no reason to mistrust anyone up to that point, but God had warned them about that tree. Eve, in the excitement of the moment, chose to disregard the very clear warnings that God had given them and instead to trust this "miracle serpent".

Think of how many people in our day make the same mistake! Eve had seen that tree there on many previous occasions. She could have said to the serpent, "You may be right in what you say, but I would like to discuss it with my husband and with God. If it is a good idea to accept your offer, I will be back tomorrow or the next day!" Just think of all the problems that could be avoided if we took that same approach when we are tempted.

Adam on the other hand, sinned deliberately in the full knowledge of what he was doing. Instead of waiting to discuss the matter with God, Adam also rushed ahead and ate of the fruit. Both of them, when they fully realized what they had done were ready to blame God!

What would you have done if you had been Adam when Eve came to him?

7. What kind of God would expel Adam and Eve on their very first offense? Would you still be alive if your parents had treated you like this? Why is God apparently so arbitrary?

This certainly seems harsh. But consider the consequences of God's possible options. If He decided simply to punish them and let them stay in the garden, then Satan would tour the universe in delight, exclaiming that he had been right that sin does not lead to death as God had said. (Genesis 2:17) If God had simply allowed them to die the natural consequence of choosing to live apart from the Source of life, they would have died right then and there, but the

universe looking on would have concluded that God had somehow killed them, and they would have obeyed God in the future not out of complete trust and love, but out of fear, which is totally unacceptable to our loving God. So the only acceptable loving thing to do was to say, “wait until I can show you the truth about My previous statement.” That answer and others associated with it did not come until Jesus died on the cross. (Romans 3:25-27)

Was it a mistake for God to say that sin leads to death? (Genesis 2:17) Does it seem to you that God really needed to expel Adam and Eve on their first offense? Couldn't He have been a little more forgiving? (Matthew 18:21-35)

8. When God came down to talk to them, why did He call out, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9) Didn't He know? Compare the story of Babel (Genesis 11:5), and Abraham and Sodom. (Genesis 18:20)

In many places in the Bible, God allows Himself to be pictured as having the usual limitations of an ordinary human being. This is called *anthropomorphism*—from a Greek word that means “in the likeness or form of a human being”. God did this not because any of these limitations were real for Him, but so that we could relate to Him as a Friend who is easier for us to understand. God chooses to speak to us as if He were a human like us.

If God chose to speak to us using heavenly language or ways of expression, would we be able to comprehend them? Is it a mistake for God to be so willing to reach down to us at our level?

9. How do you think Adam felt as he tried to kill that first lamb? With a stone?

It was God's original intent that the process of sacrificing a lamb as a sin offering would be an absolutely horrendous and abhorrent thing each time humans did it. It was to teach us how terrible sin is—it even results in the death of innocent victims. But very quickly people became so calloused about death that killing animals was considered a very usual and ordinary thing. It reached the place where in the times of Jesus, the offerings in the court of the temple were carried on like some kind of circus. The priests who carried out the ceremony often received a portion of the sacrifice, so it became a kind of competition to see who could attract the most “customers”.

No doubt Adam was nauseated and horrified by the sight of that first blood. Perhaps he even exclaimed to God, “this is making me sick!” and God may have responded, “I hope it always makes you sick!” We should recognize sin for the terrible thing it is, and fear it. Instead we have become accustomed to sin and quite comfortable with it. As a result of the many ways in which our thinking has become warped and twisted, we now fear God and love sin! How could we allow Satan to twist things so backwards!?

Is sin really deadly serious? How do you know for sure?

10. What kind of a God would destroy all but eight in a flood? Could you have destroyed all: women, children, babies, animals? What do you think would have happened if God had not stepped in? Would He have lost contact with man completely? Why didn't He just let everything go bad and self-destruct at the time of the flood? Why didn't God just send His Son at that point? Don't you think the Pharisees, in the time of Christ, prayed for a flood to destroy all the “wicked people” (especially Romans) so they could control the world?

See handout Genesis #6 on “**Genesis - Some Background Thoughts**”. How do you suppose Satan felt as the time of the flood approached and it seemed that the whole world was turning to his side? There must have been an enormous amount of gloating in Satan’s camp as they felt that they were just about to win the war here on planet earth (after losing in heaven!). But God realized that there were still some very important things to be said, that could not yet be explained adequately to human beings or even to the beings in the rest of the universe.

So God did something that surprised and angered even the Devil. God “rescued” the one family that were still paying some attention to Him by bringing them into the ark with a representative group of animals. Then God drowned all the rest. God was not being unfair in this action because all the facts were not yet on the table. No doubt Satan toured the universe and accused God of being totally unfair and arbitrary, even severe and unforgiving. But the Devil consistently uses all the force that God will allow him to exercise in persuading humans to join his side, and on this occasion God was simply trying to level up the playing field. God did not remove anyone’s freedom by drowning them. God will raise up every one of those who died in the flood to see the judgment and face God at the time of the second or third coming. (See John 5:28,29) Each one of them will be fairly judged just as every other person who has ever lived will be. There were no doubt some savable young children who drowned in the flood, but only God knows who they were. They will be in heaven and we can ask them how they feel about the events that ended their lives.

A million years into eternity, do you think we will view the flood differently than we do now? Why?

11. Does the flood tell us that God is not forgiving? Was this God the Father? Who was the God of the Old Testament? (1 Corinthians 10:4) In what way was God pleased by the odor of Noah’s sacrifice? (Genesis 8:21) What was the final result of the flood? (See the Tower of Babel, Genesis 11:1-9) What had they learned from this experience? What had God demonstrated? What did the on-looking universe learn from this? Why has God apparently done almost nothing for so many millennia since then? (Compare 2 Peter 3:8,9)

1 Corinthians 10:4 makes it quite clear that the “God” of the Old Testament was Jesus Christ Himself. Many Christians want to solve the problem of the Old Testament simply by ignoring it because they don’t know what to do with many of the stories that are included there. They suggest that God was pleased by the “odor” of sacrifices because that was the only way they could think of that God could “perceive” that a sacrifice had been offered. They knew how they felt when a lovely aroma filled the room and they believed that was how God felt when they sacrificed to Him. The Flood, as suggested above, was God’s rescue of the human race. He could not allow Satan to cut off all communication with planet earth.

But although the outcome of the flood at first appeared to be good (God was able to start over with Noah and his family) it was only a relatively short time until groups of people began gathering together to form towns and cities and they decided to protect themselves against this “God” that they didn’t trust. No one apparently appreciated what God had done for them. They were determined to build a tower high enough so they could determine what was in the clouds (and thus why it rains) or perhaps even high enough to protect themselves in case of

another flood. This was one of the first good demonstrations that the use of force can never accomplish what God wants most—freedom, love and trust.

12. Did Ham's behavior really result in the destruction of his descendants, the Canaanites? (Genesis 9:23) Is this fair? (See Exodus 20:4-6; 34:6,7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 2:33,34; 5:9,10; 7:9,10; 20:16-20; Joshua 10:40; Contrast Ezekiel 18:20)

Ham's descendants, especially the Canaanites, lived in the land which God had promised to Abraham. It was not God's goal to just wipe out one group of people so He could find a place for another group to live. The Canaanites had actually been very privileged in earlier years. God sent His first missionary (Abraham) to them. Some of them were convinced and joined themselves to the household of Abraham. (Genesis 14:14) They were given 430 years to consider their relationship to Yahweh and evidence suggests that their conduct just became more and more debased. Yahweh recognized that if He allowed the Israelites to live among such a people, they would very quickly destroy whatever good influence that He had been able to have on them.

If Israel had been truly converted as God had hoped, He would have pushed back the Canaanites with the use of "hornets" and as the Israelites settled into the land they could have gradually won these "pagans" to the service of Yahweh. This, of course, was out of the question after Israel demonstrated how quickly they could be perverted at Peor. (Numbers 25) So God was left with the only possibility that had any chance of succeeding, and that was to give the Canaanites a fair trial and opportunity to learn of the truth and then when they had clearly rejected it, to ask the Israelites to annihilate them.

13. In light of the flood, what does it say about God that He continues to wait now? Does it bother us that He continues to wait, especially for the last 150 years since we have been announcing His soon return? (Compare Jonah, Esther)

See handout Genesis #7 on "**The Reason for the Delay**". In the emergency crisis just before the flood God had to do something to avoid complete loss of His contact with this planet. In our day, God is waiting for a group that will take Him seriously enough to prepare themselves and others to stand through the very difficult final events of this world's history. God is not waiting for some distant time that He has set as the right time to come. He is waiting until He can safely allow the Devil to carry out his last attack on God's true people, knowing that they can stand up under that attack. As soon as God has a people who are so "settled into the truth" or "sealed" with God's seal that they cannot be moved no matter what the Devil does to them, then God will allow the final events to happen.

14. What was God's original purpose in calling Abraham? Was God partial in picking Abraham's family? Why do you think God called Abraham? (Compare Melchizedek, Jethro, Job) Isn't God a vegetarian? (Genesis 18:8) Why did He wait for Abraham to cook meat for Him when He could have created anything for their meal? Did God really need a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch to pass between cut pieces of animal to confirm His relationship with one of His best friends? (Genesis 15:17)

God called Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees (Southern Iraq) because God had a special mission for him to accomplish. Not only did God want to separate Abram and his wife

Sarai from their idolatrous relatives and friends, but He wanted to move them to a relatively open country where they could grow into a large nation honoring Him. Although we do not know much about the times in which Abram lived, it is quite clear that conditions had deteriorated once again to the place where there were very few people paying any attention to God.

God always meets us where **we are!** God approached Abraham using the cultural customs that were expected in Abraham's day. There are many examples in Scripture of God reaching out to meet us in ways and under circumstances which, according to other portions of Scripture are not His ideal. To God, it is much more important to commune with us than it is to argue about the methodology. Thus God uses *anthropomorphic* (See above) and culturally acceptable ways of talking and communication that are appropriate to the times in which each of us lives. How many other places in Scripture can you think of that are similar?

15. Would you dare to say to God, "Shouldn't the Judge of all the earth do what is right?" (Genesis 18:25) Would this conversation with God qualify as prayer? Did Abraham represent God well? Would you dare to talk to God as Abraham did? (Compare Moses [Exodus 32:9-14]; Peter [Acts 10:13-17]; David [Psalms 51]) What do you think of his conversation with God over Sodom? Was the heavenly reporting system inadequate? (Genesis 18:20,21. Compare Eden [3:9], Babel [11:5-7]) Isn't God omniscient? Couldn't He believe what He heard?

In Scripture there are a number of examples of people talking with God. Some of them seemed to speak with incredible forthrightness. Look at Abraham's conversation with God in Genesis 18:22-33. Would this qualify as a "prayer"? Abraham spoke very straight with God and was called His friend. (See Genesis 18:25; 15:6; 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23) Moses had a similar experience (Exodus 32:7-14) and so did Peter (Acts 10:9-16). They seemed to know God very well and they were jealous for His reputation. But they felt amazingly free, reverently, to speak very candidly to God.

Once again God is using language that is appropriate to us to describe Himself. God knew exactly what was going on in Sodom, but Abraham didn't. So God discussed the situation in Sodom with Abraham as if He had the same limitations that Abraham did. There is no limitation in God's knowledge.

Psalms 139 is one of the clearer places in Scripture where we are told that God knows and sees everything. We speak of this capacity of God as His "omniscience". This word never occurs in Scripture but the ideas are there. Read Psalms 139 and 147 and compare Jeremiah 23:23,24; Zechariah 4:10; Isaiah 40:13,14,25-28. God even knows the future as well as the past. See Daniel 2, 7-9; Isaiah 7:14-9:6; Matthew 24, etc. Since God obviously knows everything past, present and future, He is only talking to us in the kind of language we understand.

16. Why did both Abraham and Sarah laugh when God told them they were going to have a baby? (Genesis 17:17; 18:11-15) Why would God ask Abraham to sacrifice the son of the promise? Did Abraham ask any questions? (Hebrews 11:19; *PP* 148-155) Shouldn't we say, "If God has said it, I believe it and that is all there is to it?" Pay special attention to what this story says to the on-looking universe. (1 Peter 1:12)

After God had promised several times that He would give them many descendants Abraham and Sarah had grown old and basically accepted the idea that Ishmael would be their “son”. Sarah was way past menopause and she was certain that her time for having children was over. Under those circumstances, it is not surprising that both of them laughed when God told them they were going to have a baby boy. But Abraham had lied about his wife on several occasions suggesting that he wasn’t completely sure that he could trust God to care for him when it came right down to the details of his day-by-day life. Since God had chosen Abraham as the one person He was going to try to demonstrate His plan through, God needed to know and show the on-looking universe that He could trust this man. Thus God brought on Abraham in his old age the severest test of all. Finally, Abraham was ready and he stood firm under this test. It was a marvelous demonstration to the universe that Abraham was a real “friend” of God. Many questions could and should be raised about this story: Was this a case of God asking Abraham to perform a human sacrifice? Was this test harder for Abraham or Isaac? Why did Isaac agree to die? See handout Genesis #6 on “**Genesis - Some Background Thoughts**” section on *Abraham Offers Isaac*. See especially *Patriarchs and Prophets* pp. 154, 155.

17. What does it mean for God to say He recognizes Abraham as righteous because of his trust? (Genesis 15:6) How could Abraham be credited with trusting God, when he lacked the faith even to tell the truth about his wife? (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-13) Please note that Isaac did the same. (Genesis 26:1-11) If God had foreknowledge what is the meaning of “confidence?”

Again we see God here using our language. God knew before Abraham was born what he was going to do. But for us reading the account it is easier for us to relate to the story when it is put in our terminology. God was simply saying here that Abraham would turn out to be a trusted friend (See 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8 and James 2:23). If you had omniscience, how would you discuss such matters with others who do not?

18. Why did God give them the rite of circumcision, when He foreknew that it would eventually lead to so much conflict and misunderstanding? (Genesis 17:11-12; PP 364)

Abraham and his descendants lived in the midst of a large group of tribes that generally worshiped fertility. It is quite possible that the giving of the rite of circumcision had something to do with this. If a young Israelite man were tempted to sneak into one of these fertility cult services perhaps the fact that he was circumcised might have made his origins obvious and prevented him from getting fully involved with some temple “virgin”. Some experts believe that circumcision also is more hygienic for the male and leads to less infection and less cancer in his female partner. God repeatedly asked Abraham and his descendants (and us) to do things that set us apart from the “world”. These things are meant to be a protection for us. Unfortunately, later the children of Israel, especially the males who had gone through the rite, began to feel that this rite identified them as God’s special people and thus gave them the right to many special privileges. It was this misunderstanding of the original intent of circumcision that God later argued against and not the circumcision itself.

19. What kind of a God would turn Lot’s wife into a pillar of salt just because she glanced back? (Genesis 19:26) Why would Lot offer his virgin daughters to that crowd instead of the angels?

(Genesis 19:7) If Lot is to be considered a “just man” (2 Peter 2:8,9) isn’t his first duty to his daughters?

This passage is first of all clear evidence of how different the culture was in Lot’s day than it is in our own. We cannot imagine a father in his right mind offering his virgin daughters to such a crowd under any circumstances, let alone in an attempt to protect the honor and dignity of strangers! One wonders how Lot’s daughters could have remained virgins in that environment! It is clear from events that happened later (Genesis 19:30-38) that their thinking had been corrupted even if their bodies were not. Why were Lot and these two daughters living in a cave when uncle Abraham was nearby?

This is primarily a thought question. What would you have done? Would we all be better off if God had just allowed Lot and his entire family to disappear into history instead of giving rise to the very troublesome nations known as the Ammonites and the Moabites? This story must be compared to others in the Scriptures: See handout Genesis #8 on “**From Sodom and Gomorrah to Hell**”.

20. Why would the chosen man of God offer nose rings and bracelets to a potential wife for Isaac? (Genesis 24:22) Would Peter (1 Peter 3:3) and Paul (1 Timothy 2:9) condemn this?

Once again we are reminded that things were different in those days. These gifts were the normal things given to a potential bride in those days. God Himself is pictured as doing something similar in Ezekiel’s day! (See Ezekiel 16:11-13) By contrast in Peter and Paul’s day these things often were worn by the “temple prostitutes” who sponsored sexuality as a part of religion. We cannot try to force our cultural norms on people in other times and nations. There are many, many examples of such cultural differences in Biblical times, especially in Old Testament times. Once again God had more important things to accomplish than to stop everything and try to “straighten out” practices that we might consider questionable.

21. How do you think God regarded Jacob’s many wives, and their stealing from and deceiving their own relatives as they departed? (Genesis 31:19-21)

It should be obvious from the story itself that this arrangement was not God’s ideal and it led to many problems. These stories are not told to set up these individuals as examples for us or for the people in any other generation. They are told simply to report on what actually happened so that we can get enough of the context so we can understand how and why God did what He did under the circumstances. Almost every part of this story is a concession to some situation that was far from God’s ideal. Jacob fled to Laban because he had stolen the birthright from his brother. Jacob discovered that he was married to Leah instead of Rachel after being deceived by Laban. Laban had squandered the dowry that Jacob had given to him, which should have been the rightful possession of his daughters, etc. Rachel apparently felt that having this family “god” with them might protect her in some way. It obviously didn’t work since a short time later she died in childbirth. What would you have done if you had been in God’s place?

22. If God chose the tribe of Judah as the future kings of Israel, why is He killing off Judah’s sons? (Genesis 38:1-30) Why do you think God chose Judah and Tamar (a Canaanite teen-age bride, one time prostitute) as the ancestors of Christ? (Compare Rahab. [See Joshua 2 and Ruth 4]) Why did He choose to mention them specifically by name? (Matthew 1:3)

This is a great story in the Bible, but one that many people have never heard of. This one chapter interlude in the story of Joseph is in marked contrast to the behavior of Joseph. Judah was about to be absorbed into the Canaanite peoples it appears when the sudden deaths of Er and Onan led to a significant problem. Jacob was soon left with one son, since his wife died, and Judah was afraid that if he asked Shelah to marry Tamar he too might die. We have no clear indications of why either of the first two sons died. Sudden deaths, especially at an early age were often considered as a punishment from God. It is possible that they had some congenital disease, or that God actually killed them. We do not know for sure.

The tribe of Judah was not chosen as the ancestral line of Christ and the ruling household of Israel because of this behavior of their ancestors, but in spite of it. Judah himself later became quite a noble leader among the brothers. I believe that this story and the stories of Rahab and Ruth were preserved, and these women's names specifically mentioned in Matthew 1 because Jesus, who is the only Person ever to be born on this planet with the opportunity to choose His own ancestors, wanted us to know that He was the descendant of a very typical family. In fact, these women despite their sins, were noteworthy for their courage in doing what they did. God is not afraid to have them recognized and pointed out as His ancestors!

23. What is the purpose of all the genealogies? Were these just for the benefit of the Israelites? Why are so few women mentioned in these genealogies?

Genealogies were considered very important to the ancient peoples because they served as a link to one's ancestral line. It was by preserving the ancestral lists that people could be sure that they were descendants of important people of the past. This custom, when practiced in moderation can serve a useful purpose, but when carried to exorbitant lengths was condemned by the apostle Paul. (See 1 Timothy 1:4 and Titus 3:9)

Unfortunately, the ancient world (and even much of our world today) is a world of men. Women seemed to be present just to serve the needs of men. This was not God's plan, but the result of human sin. (God created them equal in the beginning - Genesis 1:26; 2:18-25). The Biblical record is simply a report of how things were, not a report of how they should have been or how God had planned for things in the beginning.

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khart@llu.edu

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