

The Book of Genesis

**Leaders' Notes for
Central Focus and Home Groups**

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
GENESIS 1:1-2:3	6
AIM	6
CONTEXT	6
STRUCTURE	6
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT	7
THINKING IT THROUGH	7
GENESIS 2:4-25	8
AIM	8
CONTEXT	8
STRUCTURE	8
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT	9
THINKING IT THROUGH	10
GENESIS 3:1-24	11
AIM	11
CONTEXT	11
STRUCTURE	11
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT	12
THINKING IT THROUGH	13
GENESIS 4:1-26	14
AIM	14
CONTEXT	14
STRUCTURE	14
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT	15
THINKING IT THROUGH	15
GENESIS 5:1-7:24	17
AIM	17
CONTEXT	17
STRUCTURE	17
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT	18
THINKING IT THROUGH	18
GENESIS 8:1-9:29	20
AIM	20
CONTEXT	20
STRUCTURE	20
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT	22
THINKING IT THROUGH	22
GENESIS 10:1-11:26	23
AIM	23
CONTEXT	23
STRUCTURE	23

Study Notes on Genesis

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT	24
THINKING IT THROUGH	24
GENESIS 11:27-12:20.....	25
AIM.....	25
CONTEXT	25
STRUCTURE	25
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT	26
THINKING IT THROUGH	27
GENESIS 13:1-14:24.....	28
AIM.....	28
CONTEXT	28
STRUCTURE	28
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT	29
THINKING IT THROUGH	29
GENESIS 15:1-17:26.....	31
AIM.....	31
CONTEXT	31
STRUCTURE	31
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT	32
THINKING IT THROUGH	33
GENESIS 18:1-19:38.....	34
AIM.....	34
CONTEXT	34
STRUCTURE	34
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT	35
THINKING IT THROUGH	36
GENESIS 20:1-22:19.....	37
AIM.....	37
CONTEXT	37
STRUCTURE	37
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT	38
THINKING IT THROUGH	39
GENESIS 23:1-25:18.....	40
AIM.....	40
CONTEXT	40
STRUCTURE	40
CONNECTING WITH THE NT	41
THINKING IT THROUGH	41
GENESIS 25:19-28:9.....	42
AIM.....	42
CONTEXT	42
STRUCTURE	42
CONNECTING WITH THE NT	43
THINKING IT THROUGH	43

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 28:10-30:43	45
AIM.....	45
CONTEXT.....	45
STRUCTURE.....	45
CONNECTING WITH THE NT.....	46
THINKING IT THROUGH.....	47
GENESIS 31:1-33:20	48
AIM.....	48
CONTEXT.....	48
STRUCTURE.....	48
CONNECTING WITH THE NT.....	49
THINKING IT THROUGH.....	49
GENESIS 34:1-36:43	51
AIM.....	51
CONTEXT.....	51
STRUCTURE.....	51
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT.....	52
THINKING IT THROUGH.....	53
GENESIS 37:1-39:23	54
AIM.....	54
CONTEXT.....	54
STRUCTURE.....	54
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT.....	55
THINKING IT THROUGH.....	55
GENESIS 40:1-41:57	56
AIM.....	56
CONTEXT.....	56
STRUCTURE.....	56
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT.....	57
THINKING IT THROUGH.....	58
GENESIS 42:1-43:34	59
AIM.....	59
CONTEXT.....	59
STRUCTURE.....	59
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT.....	60
THINKING IT THROUGH.....	60
GENESIS 44:1-46:27	61
AIM.....	61
CONTEXT.....	61
STRUCTURE.....	61
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT.....	62
THINKING IT THROUGH.....	62
GENESIS 46:28-48:22	64
AIM.....	64
CONTEXT.....	64

Study Notes on Genesis

STRUCTURE	64
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT	65
THINKING IT THROUGH	65
GENESIS 49:1-50:26.....	66
AIM.....	66
CONTEXT	66
STRUCTURE	66
CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT	67
THINKING IT THROUGH	67

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 1:1-2:3

AIM

- To see that God creates and rules the whole universe
- To see the unique nature and role of human beings within God's universe

CONTEXT

Genesis, as its title implies, is a book of beginnings. It narrates the beginning of the world. It narrates the beginning of God's relationship with human beings. It narrates the beginning of our fall into a sinful state and its initial effects. It narrates the beginnings of God's plan to redeem and renew his Creation. In many ways the rest of the Bible is the outworking of Genesis - to begin to grasp Genesis will help us to grasp better the whole biblical story. All the main themes of the Bible are introduced in this book in one way or another.

STRUCTURE

1:1-2 In the beginning God....

1:3-31 God creating...

2:1-3 God resting...

1. IN THE BEGINNING GOD.... (1:1-2)

Verse 1 serves as a summary statement for the whole of chapter 1. It tells us that God and God alone is responsible for the creation of the universe. This is the fundamental choice human beings are faced with as they think about origins - is God responsible for the universe or some other force (e.g. matter plus chance)? Verse 1 signals that God is the main actor in the whole creation narrative and in many ways the main actor in the whole biblical narrative. If he makes all things then all things are responsible to him.

Verse 2 takes us back to the beginning. Interestingly it tells us that the earth existed before God's speaking activity in v.3. However, it existed in a state of formlessness, emptiness and darkness. God's creative activity in v.3ff, as we will soon see, will be to bring form, to fill and to bring light.

It is probably worth saying that 1:2 rules out any debate whether the earth is young or old. Christians in the past have mistakenly tried to date the earth from the genealogies in Genesis (in the 17th century Bishop Ussher confidently asserted that the world was created in 4004 BC!). The earth might be billions of years old according to 1:2.

However, even in this formless state, God is present by his Spirit who hovers over the waters. None of it is outside his control or domain.

2. GOD CREATING... (1:3-31)

These verses paint a picture of a God who sovereignly orders the universe by his word (cf. v.3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). The universe he makes is entirely good (cf. v.4, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25) - in fact at the conclusion of creation it is declared to be 'very good' (v.31). He brings form where there was formlessness and light where there was darkness.

The creation account is highly stylised and has a tight literary construction.

The number 7 is a number of completion in Hebrew. There are a variety of repetitions (e.g. 'There was evening and there was morning...', 'And God said...', 'And it was so.', 'And God saw that it was good') which all serve to establish a sense of order and completeness.

The creation proceeds according to a 'framework pattern' - the first three days establish frameworks or zones [day 1 - light (v.3-5), day 2 - Heaven, sky and seas (v.6-8), day 3 - dry land and vegetation (v.9-12)].

Then in days four to six God 'fills' these zones [day 4 corresponding to day 1 - sun, moon and stars (v.14-

Study Notes on Genesis

19), day 5 corresponding to day 2 - living creatures such as birds and fish (v.20-23), day 6 corresponding to day 3 - human beings (v.26-31)].

This structure leads us to believe that the narrative is not to be read literally. If we attempt to read it literally then we face problems such as how can there be light in day 1 but no sun to produce the light until day 4? Therefore, we are probably not dealing with six 24-hour days. Rather the author has chosen to describe the historical reality of God's creation of the universe using sophisticated literary devices.

A brief excursus on Genesis 1 and Science

Hence, even though Genesis 1 is an account of space-time history (i.e. God really did make the world) it is not a scientific account. This would be to make a category mistake. It's literary genre is not a scientific paper rather it's primeval history which by the nature of the case is not going to read like other history.

Therefore, we are free to engage in scientific investigation of origins by the usual methods of modern science (ie hypothesis, experiment and theory). The boundary Genesis sets for Christian scientists is that God not chance is responsible for whatever process might emerge as the mechanism of creation. Any mechanism which rules out God is to be rejected.

Notice that the climax of creation is humanity in verses 26-31. This point is made in the following ways:

- i. Humanity is made last.
- ii. The creation of humanity is given the most space in the account.
- iii. Only human beings are made in the image of God and are therefore marked off from the rest of animate life in God's world (v.26-27).
- iv. Humanity (both men and women, signalling their essential equality) is given the task of filling the earth and subduing it. They are given dominion over the rest of the creation and are able to eat plant life for food (v.28).

The command to fill and subdue demonstrates that the creation is not yet all that God intends it to be. He has filled it with potential and intends humankind to open up this potential in cultural activity (cf. chapter 4).

3. GOD RESTING... (2:1-3)

The end of creation is God resting. This is not a passive cessation from work - he still upholds and sustains all things in his universe. Rather it demonstrates the completion and perfection of his work of creation. It is finished and it is very good.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. God made and sustains everything through Jesus (Col 1:15-17).
2. Jesus is the perfect man, made in the image of God, who subdues the earth and exercises perfect dominion (1 Cor 15:47-49, Hebrews 2:5-9).
3. The image of God in humanity is renewed as we become like Jesus (2 Cor 4:4-6).
4. God will one day renew the Creation (Rev 21:1ff).
5. We will one day join in God's rest in the new creation if we keep believing the gospel (Heb 4:1-11).

THINKING IT THROUGH

How would you explain to a friend who is not a Christian the difference the biblical story of creation makes to your view of God, people and the world?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 2:4-25

AIM

- To see that God has always planned to live in a personal relationship or love and trust with humanity.

CONTEXT

Genesis 1 has introduced us to a God of enormous creative power. He has brought order to a chaotic and formless earth through his word (1:2-3). But, this order is to be balanced against the exuberant diversity God places within his creation (e.g. 1:21, 24)

Mankind is the pinnacle of God's creation since mankind alone among all God's creatures is made in the image of God (note they both share the command to be fruitful and to multiply - v.22, 28). This uniqueness is also captured by humanity being the final item on God's creation agenda. Humanity, male and female, are commanded to fill the earth and subdue it (1:28). This task seems to capture the image of God - he has made and rules the universe but now delegates this task to mankind.

On the seventh day God rested (2:1-3). His task of creation is completed even though he continues to sustain his universe. This idea of God's rest is a major theme throughout the Bible (see notes on chapter 1).

Chapter 2 begins a new section which ends at 4:26. Within this section there are three scenes - 2:3-25, 3:1-24, 4:1-25 with each scene including a narrative followed by a poem followed by an epilogue. Each new section of Genesis will now begin with the phrase, "These are the generations of..." (cf. 2:4, 51:1). This initial section concerns the generations of the heavens and the earth i.e. the things which the heavens and the earth have produced.

The focus shifts in chapter 2 as the camera zooms in to examine the particular relationship God has with humanity in a particular place. The atmosphere of this chapter is far more intimate and local than the grand, universal atmosphere of chapter 1. It teaches us that God is both transcendent and immanent.

STRUCTURE

2:4 Introduction

2:5-14 Man created

2:15-17 Man commanded

2:18-25 Man coupled

1. INTRODUCTION (V.4)

See comments above on the "these are the generations formula". The other significant point in this verse might be the reversal of 'heavens and earth' to 'earth and heavens'. The priority given to earth might signify the change of focus in the section.

2. MAN CREATED (V. 5-14)

The mode of creation shifts in this account. God does not create by his authoritative word. Rather he 'forms' and 'breathes' (v.7), he 'plants' (v.8) and he 'makes to spring up' (v.9). The suggestion is of a far more hands on involvement. He is not a distant God - rather he draws close to humanity.

Also, it is noticeable that God is in the business of creating a particular place within his creation where he will live with humanity. The place is a garden in the region of Eden (v.8). Verses 10-14 stress the particularity of the place - it is 'somewhere' within the universe. We have moved from the universal, spaciousness of chapter 1 to a very local space in chapter 2.

Notice God's priorities in v.9 - the trees are 'pleasant to the sight and good for food'. God is concerned about pleasure - his Creation engages and provides for all our senses. There is no bare pragmatism about God!

Study Notes on Genesis

God is near to the man he has made.

3. MAN COMMANDED (V. 15-17)

The author has already introduced the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in verse 9. In these verses he now tells the reason God puts them in the garden.

Notice again God's close involvement with the man he has made - he takes him and puts him in the garden to work it. Notice too that work is a pre-Fall reality!

God now issues him with a command and a warning. All the trees are given to him for food except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We assume that the knowledge of good and evil is God's prerogative hence for man to eat it is to try and usurp God. The warning is clear in v. 17b - to eat will be to die.

Why does God introduce this factor into the garden? I think there are a number of reasons:

- i. God wants total trust and obedience from the man he has made. Therefore, he puts him on probation. The tree is there to constantly invite the man to trust God rather than himself. God has a far more secure relationship ultimately in mind for them. Adam is not yet all that God wills him to be.
- ii. The episode indicates that God will relate to his people via covenants. He will give them promises with signs attached to them (in this case the tree) with the assurance of continued blessing for keeping the command or curse for failing to keep the command.

4. MAN COUPLED (V.18-25)

If chapter 1 emphasised the equality of male and female (both created in the image of God, both given the mandate to subdue the earth 1:26-28) then chapter 2 stresses their complementarity.

God has built man for relationship (in order to image Him?) and he needs a helper for the task of subduing the earth. The Hebrew word for 'helper' in v.18 does not imply inferiority - it is most often used in the OT for God helping Israel. She comes to the aid of man - more like the cavalry than a servant?!

The image of woman being a 'rib' is not demeaning within the metaphorical world of Genesis 2. The animals are not a 'fit' for man (v.20), only one taken from him who is like him but different will do (v.21-23). When Adam sees her he is moved to poetry (v.23)!

The author tells us that this explains the nature of marriage in v.24:

- i. It is a leaving of parents implying a public act
- ii. it is a holding fast to a wife implying exclusivity
- iii. it is a one flesh relationship implying permanence

The author summarises the openness of the relationship in v.25 - the narrative of chapter 3 indicates that this is about far more than issues of physical nakedness (cf. 3:7).

But, given the concerns of the rest of the chapter, why introduce a section on marriage here? I think the answer might be yielded in the next section....

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. The rest of the Bible stresses God's desire to live intimately with his people - the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34), the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11), the incarnation (John 1:14) and this reaches a climax in the renewed Creation (Revelation 21:1-4, 22:1-5). This relationship is always covenantally structured.
 2. In the renewed Creation humanity is secure and no longer on probation. We 'bear the image of the man of heaven' (1 Cor 15:49). We are 'in Christ' and reach the destiny for which God made us (Eph 1:3-14).
 3. Marriage is used by the OT writers to describe God's desire for an intimate relationship with his people (e.g. Hosea 2:14-20) and the NT writers to describe Christ's relationship with his people (e.g. Eph 5:22-33). Maybe this is the fundamental reason why the passage on marriage appears in the
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Study Notes on Genesis

garden scene in Genesis 2. However, do not allow this perspective to flatten the NT's use of this passage to comment on marriage lived in this world (e.g. 1 Cor 11:2-16, Eph 5:22-33).

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. How does this passage comment on the view of God present in other religions?
2. How does it comment on other views of human beings common today?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 3:1-24

AIM

- To see the nature and consequences of sin in God's world.

CONTEXT

Genesis 1 has given us an account of the creation of the heavens and earth. It emphasises that God brings order out of chaos (1:1-3). He creates by his word and makes humanity the peak of his creation since man and woman alone are made in his image (1:27). The equality of men and women is stressed as they are both made in the image of God and are both given the command to subdue the earth (1:26). The climax of creation is the rest of God which is left open-ended - we are never told that the seventh day has evening and morning. This is God's eternal rest which we will be invited to join in Christ (Heb 2-3).

Genesis 2 moves from the macro account of the creation of the universe to the micro account to the garden. God makes a special space within the universe where he lives intimately with humanity. Mankind is put on probation (2:15-16) - will he trust God's word or not? Will he attempt to seize God's rights? Failure to trust will result in death. The account of the creation of woman stresses that she completes or compliments man - she is a helper to him (a word usually used of God's help to Israel in the OT) and is made from his rib. He cannot do without her. The chapter ends on a note of openness and trust (2:25).

Chapter 3 gives us the story of humanity's fall into sin. The probationary period comes to an end and God curses his creation. Nonetheless, as we shall see, God is gracious to his creation.

STRUCTURE

1-6 Sin enters...

7-19 ...the world is cursed...

20-24 ...but, there is hope.

1. SIN ENTERS... (V.1-6)

The conversation between Eve and the serpent is an attack on the word and character of God. It's a mystery as to how the serpent came to be so crafty (v.1a) but he is still a creation of God and therefore subject to God.

He causes the woman to doubt that God has forbidden them to eat of the tree (v.1b) and she in turn responds by misrepresenting God's word - did God tell them not to *touch* the tree (v.3 cf. 2:17)? The serpent then launches a full frontal assault on God's word in v. 4 - he tells the woman that she will not die but will rather be like God himself. You can almost smell the temptation in the air as the writer piles up the phrases in v. 6 - 'good for food', 'delight to the eyes', 'the tree was to be desired to make one wise'. She goes with her senses rather than God's word and sins along with her husband. There is no suggestion that they are anything other than willing.

Therefore, the heart of sin seems to be a desire to be like God. This is accomplished by ignoring his word and distorting his character.

2. ...THE WORLD IS CURSED... (V.7-19)

The consequences of sin are immediate - the couple become conscious of their nakedness and try to cover up (3:7). They try to hide from one another - their nakedness which had previously been a sign of openness and trust is now distorted into shame and lack of trust.

But, even as they hide themselves from one another they also hide themselves from God (v.8-13). Once more nakedness becomes a symbol of a loss of trust and openness between God and Adam (v.10). God is winsome as he pursues Adam and Eve in the garden but for them sin means they shift the blame - "The woman ... she gave me fruit of the tree ... the serpent deceived me and I ate" (v.12-13).

Study Notes on Genesis

God then pronounces curses:

- i. **On the serpent** ... there is no suggestion at this point that the serpent is anything other than a snake. Hence, the curse is one of humiliation which will function as a sign that all who tempt God's people to rebel against God will ultimately be humiliated.

Verse 15 opens up a bigger story and suggests that the snake's offspring and the woman's offspring, will be involved in conflict. The woman's offspring will be victorious as he bruises the head of the serpent. The motif of the seed of the woman will become important throughout Genesis as God raise sup and preserves a line which will result in the reversal of the curse (e.g. Gen 12:1-3 cf. Rom 16:20).

- ii. **On the woman** ... the promise of pain in childbearing at first sight seems enigmatic. The original command to fill the earth is now complicated and pain is introduced. The key is probably to relate it back to verse 15 - there will be a seed who will bruise Satan's head but the emergence of this seed will not be without struggle and pain. Pain in childbearing is a sign of this reality. (cf. Rom 8:22 where the whole creation is described as experiencing this pain until the day of renewal)

God also describes the distortion of the marital relationship. Instead of harmony there will now be struggle. The words 'desire and rule' also appear in 4:7 where sin wants to dominate Cain but he is to subject it. Therefore, 3:16b seems to describe a situation where the two marriage partners try to dominate one another.

- iii. **On the man** ... the original command to subdue the earth is also now complicated and pain is introduced (v.17b) . The earth will no longer be compliant and will resist man's attempts to subdue it.

The whole 'cursing' section (v.14-19) is written as one poem and is bookended by the mention of 'dust' (v.14 and v.19). This inclusion seems to speak of a radical reversal of creation - God brought life out of the dust (2:7) but now life will return to dust. Will there ever be a man who will not return to dust? Is there any hope

3. ... BUT, THERE IS HOPE (V.20-24).

There is a sadness about these verses - life after Eden is a banishment from home, an exclusion from the source of life (3:24). Let's not miss the climactic note of judgement in these verses - will there ever be a way back?

However, there is much in these verses which speaks of the grace of God too.

- i. Even though the original commands to fill the earth and subdue it are now pain-full nonetheless they will continue (v.22 and v.23).
- ii. The woman will have offspring who will bruise the serpent's head. (v.20)
- iii. Death is not immediate - there is life (albeit harsh) outside the garden (v.23-24)
- iv. God continues to exercise compassion towards humanity as he makes them garments better than the garments they made for themselves (v.21 cf. v.7). It might be pushing the text too hard to see anticipations of sacrifice here (although the idea is present by 4:3) but it at least suggests that God will deal with the loss of trust and openness.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. Adam functioned as the head of the whole human race. We were all 'in Adam' and his sin is our sin, his death results in our death. The death of Jesus creates a new humanity out of the faithful who now find themselves 'in Christ' and made alive in Christ (Romans 5:12-21)
 2. Our sure hope is that the image of the man of dust (Adam) will be replaced by the image of the man of heaven (Christ). One day our dustlike, death-filled flesh will be raised with Christ to be immortal (1 Cor 15:42-57).
 3. Christ is the one who bruises the serpent's head (Rom 16:20, Revelation 20:1-3).
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Study Notes on Genesis

4. Christ re-opens the way to the tree of life. The sword carrying cherubim are removed by Christ. But far from finding the tree of life in a garden we now find it in a city - the earth has been finally subdued and filled through Christ. In the new City the faithful need no longer fear banishment since they are in Christ and the curse has been removed (Revelation 22:1-5).
5. God will one day remove the curse from his creation and renew it - the pain of childbirth will be removed (Rom 8:18-25).

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. What's the difference between 'sin' and 'sins'?
2. How do our 'sins' reveal our desire to be God?
3. How do we experience the curse and the consequences of sin day by day?
4. How do we experience the ongoing grace of God preserving his creation?
5. What truths about Jesus do we need to grasp to build our faith in these circumstances?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 4:1-26

AIM

- To see the continuing consequences of sin in God's world.
- To see the emergence of two lines of humanity - the faithful and the faithless.

CONTEXT

In chapter 1 God has brought order out of chaos in the creation of the universe in. He pronounces it to be good and blesses it.

Chapter 2 has introduced us to the intimate relationship God desires to have with humanity as he places the man and woman in a garden. The marriage relationship celebrated at the end of chapter 2 mirrors the relationship intended between God and humanity.

Chapter 3 records the intrusion of sin into the garden. Sin is a refusal by humanity to live by God's word and a declaration of independence from God. Adam and Eve try and seize what belongs only to God (3:4-7). The consequences are immediate - all previously harmonious relationships are disrupted. The relationship between God and humanity, man and woman, the physical world and man - all are dislocated (3:7-19). Humanity is poignantly shut out of the garden and the way to the tree of life is blocked (3:24).

But, there is hope. 3:15 promises that the offspring of the woman will bruise the serpent's head. We are left asking, "will this offspring be the way back to the intimacy of the garden and the tree of life?"

STRUCTURE

1-16 The Progress of Sin

17-24 The Intensification of Sin

25-26 The Reversal of Sin?

1. THE PROGRESS OF SIN (v.1-16)

Ironically and graciously life outside of the garden goes on - Adam and Eve take up the command of 1:28 and begin to multiply in 3:1. Death is not immediate. However, there is a hint of pride in the conception. Eve shares the credit for the conception of Cain with God (4:1 cf. 4:25 where she does not) and thus foreshadows the destiny of Cain.

The key question in the Cain and Abel story is "why does God reject Cain's offering?" The text's suggestion is that Cain made any old offering (v.3 fruit of the ground) whereas Abel offered his best (v.4 - the firstborn and their fat portions). The latter was apparently faithful whereas the former was not (cf. 1 John 3:12).

Cain's reaction on God's refusal of his offering seems to confirm this analysis. Instead of being remorseful and repentant, he is angry (v.5). God rebukes him in v.6-7. The thrust of the verses seems to be that if he does well i.e. makes an offering in faith then he will be accepted. But, if he does not do well then sin will dominate him.

Immediately after this warning from God Cain kills Abel. Crouching sin has sprung (cf. v.6). Sin once more disrupts Cain's relationship with God (he refuses to believe his words of v.7). To go the way of sin is to be homeless, is to be away from the presence of the Lord (v.12, 16 cf. 3:24). It also disrupts his relationship with his brother. Death has entered God's world. And sin disrupts Cain's relationship with the land as God once more curses it (v.11-12).

Nonetheless, God is gracious. He protects and preserves Cain (v.15). Life will go on in God's world even among the faithless. Reality has become deeply ambiguous - sin's progress means terrible disruption but God graciously withholds the full force of it's consequences

Study Notes on Genesis

2. THE INTENSIFICATION OF SIN (v.17-24)

This section confirms the profound ambiguity in the world. Once more the original creation mandates to fill and subdue the earth are carried out. Children are born (v.17-18), cities are built (v.17), agriculture develops (v.20), music begins (v.21) and technology starts (v.22). God's world is being filled, opened up and subdued.

However, there is a sinister note of foreboding in these verses. God is nowhere acknowledged. Culture is being developed independently of him. This does not negate the value of culture (cf. 1:28 which places it at the heart of God's purposes for his world) but it does indicate that all is not well. These things, which are good, will be used against God (e.g. the sin in the city in chapter 11).

Moreover, Lamech's song in v.23-24 is a loud declaration of belligerence. He seems to celebrate the way of vengeance rather than mercy. Cain exacted vengeance on Abel for his accepted offering. Lamech now turns that into a purpose statement for his life - vengeful death is the thing which characterises his existence. Mercy will be shunned.

Life outside the garden looks bleak. Cain and his offspring appear to be colluding with the serpent. Abel is dead. Where is the offspring who will bruise the serpent's head?

3. THE REVERSAL OF SIN? (v.25-26)

To the reader's relief there is another child born to Adam and Eve. This time Eve solely credits God for his birth. Seth has a son and markedly the writer tells us that 'at that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord'. Cain's line is faithless but another line is emerging who will call upon the name of the Lord. Maybe there is a way back to the intimacy of the garden.

Notably another name for God is introduced in chapter 4 - he is now the Lord. This name is always associated with God as a covenant God. In his covenants God establishes a relationship with his people via a word of promise plus a sign (cf. 2:16 - the word plus the sign of the tree), invites them to respond in faith to the promise. He then promises blessing if they keep covenant (the good life in the garden with God forever) or curse (banishment and death) if they fail to keep covenant. Chapter 4 reminds us at the beginning and end (v.1 and v.26) that God remains the covenant God. He will be faithful even when humanity is faithless.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. Cain is used as a warning on a number of occasions.
 - i. 1 John 3:11-15 warns us against a failure to love our spiritual brothers due to a lack of spiritual life.
 - ii. Jude 11-13 likens faithless false teachers to Cain.
2. In contrast Abel is used as an example of justification by faith in Hebrews 11:4. Through his faith he still speaks to us and encourages us to live by faith too.
3. Hebrews 12:22-24 tells us that the sprinkled blood of Jesus speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Presumably Abel's blood was spilled as the consequence of Cain's act of vengeance (cf. Lamech) whereas Christ's blood is spilled as an act of mercy. This is God's way back into the intimacy of the garden.
4. The genealogy of Luke 3:23-38 traces the godly line of Jesus all the way back to Adam but via Seth's line (cf. Lk 3:38). Cain's line is bypassed and we see in Seth's line the emergence of the final serpent bruiser. This will be the line to watch in Genesis as we see God's promises being worked out.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. How do we see the ambiguity of the post-fall creation worked out day to day now?
 2. In what ways do we try and make things too black and white?
 3. How does Genesis 4 invite us to live in these circumstances?
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Study Notes on Genesis

4. How does the way Jesus fulfils Genesis 4 sustain us?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 5:1-7:24

AIM

- To see that God is serious about judging sin.
- To see that God is serious about providing a way of salvation which is received by faith.

CONTEXT

God has created and blessed a good world out of chaos (chapter 1). He has made humanity in his image and told them to fill and subdue the earth. He has planted a garden where he plans to live in intimate relationship with men and women (chapter 2). This intimacy is imaged in the intimate marriage relationship he establishes between Adam and Eve in Eden. However, Adam and Eve choose to disobey God's command (cf. 2:15-16 and 3:6) - they stop living by faith in his word and try and seize his position of authority. The consequence is that a whole complex of relationships are distorted and humanity is banished from the garden (3:7-19).

The consequences of sin are intensified in chapter 4 where the first death occurs. Cain's line is increasingly a line living in disobedience to God culminating in the boastful violence of Lamech (3:24).

However, in the middle of the story of sin there is a counter story of grace. God promises that one of Eve's offspring will bruise the head of the serpent (3:15). There is a hope for salvation. The line of Seth, Adam and Eve's third son, appears to be the one to watch - his arrival is accompanied by people calling on the name of the Lord (4:26).

Chapter 5 is the beginning of a new section (signalled by the 'generations' formula of 5:1) centred on Adam and his family. 6:9 is the start of another section centred on Noah (see 'generations' in 6:9).

STRUCTURE

5:1-6:8 The Generations of Adam

6:9-7:24 The Generations of Noah

1. THE GENERATIONS OF ADAM (5:1-6:8)

Verses 1-2 seem to deliberately recapitulate and echo the creation story of chapter 1. Adam's fathering of Seth is seen as a creative act a little like God's - he, 'fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth' (v.3). If we are right about the line of Seth being the line of salvation then the writer of Genesis is signalling the possibility of a 'new creation' via Seth's line.

The genealogy which follows is notable for a number of reasons:

- i. The length of years people live. This seems to diminish after the flood (cf. 11:10-26). The numbers might represent something unknown to us. Or the growing impact of the effects of sin might progressively lower lifespans. Best to be agnostic on this one!
- ii. The repetition of the phrase, "and he died". God meant what he said in 2:17, contrary to the serpent's insinuation in 3:4. Death is now an established part of the world even among the faithful.
- iii. The two characters who are **not** said to die in the genealogy - Enoch (v.24) and Noah (v.32). Noah eventually dies (9:29) but does not in this genealogy. Enoch is seventh in the line which is a point of perfection perhaps representing the faithful strength of the line. Noah is seen as being a 'relief bringer' from the curse (v.29).
- iv. The genealogy will eventually blend with a greater genealogy. (cf. Luke 3:23-38).

Verses 1-4 of chapter 6 are famously enigmatic and the precise identities of the main players have long eluded commentators. A likely explanation is that the 'sons of God' were earthly rulers possessed by demonic forces. Their sin is one of tyranny - they take whoever they choose to be their wives (v.2) and again subvert God's original intention that man and woman should subdue the earth in harmony with one

Study Notes on Genesis

another. The reference to the Nephilim is a historical marker - we are dealing with space-time reality here.

The conclusion of the section is that humanity's sin has become so great that God has reached the end of his patience. Verse 3 is an indication of God's patience - the 120 years is probably a reference to the time between this warning and the flood (rather than a statement about an individual's life span which continues to be more than 120 years even after the flood cf. 11:10-26). But, verse 5 shows how bad things have become - wickedness is 'great', 'every intention of the thoughts of [man's] heart was **only** evil **continually**'.

Verse 6 is easily misunderstood. It shows us that God is not unmoved by sin - he is grieved by it (although his grief does not control him). God is not caught out by sin so that he is forced to change his mind. Rather it is part of the unchanging character of God to move from doing God to those who obey him, to judging those who disobey him. He is not capricious. He is entirely predictable.

So, God plans to judge his creation. But, verse 8 hints that there is hope - 'Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord'. It's exactly what we've come to expect from the line of Seth.

2. THE GENERATIONS OF NOAH (6:9-7:24)

Verse 9 stresses the uniqueness of Noah and the reason for his special role in saving the earth. He is righteous and blameless - this does not mean he is sinless rather it is explained by the phrase, "he walked with the Lord". He was faithful in a faithless generation (cf. 7:1).

A number of things can be said about the flood narrative:

- i. God provides a way of salvation for Noah and his family. The detailed instructions for the design and building of the ark are given sovereignly by God (6:13-21). 6:18 indicates the covenantal nature of the whole project - once again God gives his word of promise to Noah and invited him to faithfully obey it.
- ii. God makes clear that the flood is a judgement for the corruption caused by sin (6:11-13).
- iii. The impact of the flood is described in terms which speak of de-creation. 7:4 - 'everything living thing I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.', 7:21-22 - 'all flesh died that moved on the earth ... everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.' The waters present in the earth's pre-Creation chaotic state (1:2) which were ordered at Creation (1:6-7) are now unleashed (7:10).

The overwhelming point of the flood narrative is that God is so grieved by sin that he is prepared to destroy all living things in his creation as an act of judgement. But, alongside this is his commitment to save a faithful people. Sin will not finally triumph.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. Enoch is given as an example to demonstrate that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:5-6)
2. Noah is given as an example of one who reverently feared God and was an heir of righteousness by faith (Hebrews 11:7).
3. Jesus teaches that the days of Noah are similar to the time before he to judge the earth (Matthew 24:36-44). They are a warning to us to be ready.
4. Baptism, a sign of salvation through water, corresponds to God's salvation of Noah (1 Peter 3:20-22). Both seem to speak of Christ's resurrection (1 Peter 3:21a).
5. Humanity will mock Christians just as it mocked Noah, refusing to believe that God will ever judge sin. But, God will judge and will re-create. (2 Peter 3:1-13). More on this in the next study!

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. In what ways do we/people try and avoid the reality of judgement?
 2. If people believe in judgement then how do they think they will face it? How does the story of Noah challenge this?
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Study Notes on Genesis

3. How does Jesus fulfil all that God does through the line of Seth to Noah? How do these things equip us to face God's judgement with confidence?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 8:1-9:29

AIM

- To see that God's ultimate intention for his creation is preservation and renewal.
- To see the continuing development of two lines of humanity

CONTEXT

The last few chapters have charted the impact of sin on the good world God made. But, alongside the story of sin and corruption they have told a counter story of hope for the final salvation of the world.

The book of the generations of Adam (5:1-6:8) began with the hint of a new creation through the line of Seth (5:1-5). The genealogy which followed emphasised the reality of death in its rhythm but also threw in a counter rhythm emphasising life (5:24, 32) through this line. Nonetheless, this line finds itself in a world where God has lost patience with the perpetual wickedness of man (6:5). He resolves to destroy all life except for Noah and his family (6:8).

The book of the generations of Noah (6:7-9:29) begins with the story of God's judgement of his world via the flood. Noah is saved due to the favour of God (6:8) which counts him righteous and blameless in his generation (6:9). The flood 'decreates' the world returning it to the watery chaos of Genesis 1:1-2. However, Noah and his family are kept safe because of their obedience to God's covenantal promise (6:18).

The second half of the book of the generations of Noah which we turn to now covers the immediate aftermath of the flood.

STRUCTURE

8:1-19 A New Beginning

8:20-9:17 A New Covenant

9:18-29 An Old Problem

1. A NEW BEGINNING (V.8:1-19)

Once more the literary structure of this section indicates a new beginning for humanity. The 'decreation' of the flood followed a strict pattern:

- the flood arrives after seven days (7:10)
- the flood continued for forty days (7:17)
- the tops of the mountains are covered (7:19)
- the waters stayed on the earth for 150 days (7:24)

This pattern is now recapitulated:

- at the end of 150 days the waters had abated (8:3)
- the tops of the mountains are uncovered (8:5)
- at the end of forty days Noah sends out a raven (8:6-7)
- the flood finishes after seven days (8:12)

The implication seems to be that the judgement is complete, passed and there is a new beginning for humanity. This is confirmed by the following factors:

- i. 8:1 echoes 1:2 - the word translated 'wind' in 8:1 is the same word translated Spirit in 1:2. Creation begins again.

Study Notes on Genesis

- ii. The language of chapter 1 regarding the description of the animals (1:21, 26) is repeated here in chapter 8 (v.17)
- iii. The command to animals and human beings to multiply given in 1:22, 28 is again repeated in 1:17, 9:7.
- iv. Noah and his family are obedient to all God tells them to do (note the repetition of 8:15-19) - a contrast to Adam and Eve?

2. A NEW COVENANT (V.8:20-9:17)

Noah begins the 'new' creation with a sacrifice which is acceptable to God (8:20-21a cf. 4:4-5). The sacrifice guarantees grace towards the creation despite the continuing evil in humanity's heart (v.21). Notice that this cannot be the final new creation - the evil intentions of humanity's heart have not been dealt with. But, this creation will be preserved.

In 9:1-7 God establishes new relationships between humanity and the animals and then within humanity. If the creation is to continue then it cannot continue as it has been. The section is bookended by the command to be fruitful and to multiply (1, 7) - the commands which follow are to guarantee life not death.

9:2-4 Animals are now made fearful of humanity and are given to humanity as food along with the green plants. The importance of blood as the symbol of life is emphasised in the prohibition of v.4

9:5-7 The principle of vengeance which treats human life cheaply and is personified by Lamech (4:25) is now tempered by the principle of justice which treats human life with dignity and value.

God's desire to see his creation continue forever is now made concrete in the covenant he establishes with creation in v.8-17. It contains the usual covenant components - the word of divine promise (v.11) accompanied by a covenant sign which seals the promise to creation and assures us that God means what he says (v.12).

It has been suggested that the bow symbolises a war bow which is turned away from the earth. Interestingly it's function is to cause God to 'remember' his covenant (v.15). 'Remembering' in the Bible is not to make a mental note of something you might forget. Rather it is to make real in the present covenant promises (cf. Luke 22:19). God is committed to the continuation of his creation

3. AN OLD PROBLEM (V.9:18-29)

But, all is not well. A brave new world beckons but sin again raises it's head in an even more intense way. The question in these verses is, 'what's Ham's sin?'. Many of the commentators (reflecting evangelicalism's over concern with alcohol and nudity?) go for some variant of voyeurism which violates respect for his father. There are a number of things which count against this view. Verse 21 can be translated to indicate that someone uncovers Noah (presumably Ham) and verse 24 suggests that Ham 'did' something to Noah. If so then what was it? I think it was some serious sexual assault, maybe rape, for the following reasons:

- i. The language of 'uncovering' and 'covering' nakedness is used in the Law as a circumlocution for serious sexual offences particularly incest (Lev 18, 20:10-21).
- ii. These offences are particularly associated with the Canaanites, the descendants of Ham (Lev 18:24-30).
- iii. This explains the severity of the curse Noah places on Ham (9:25) which is surely over the top for filial disrespect.
- iv. A parallel passage occurs in Genesis 19:30-38 where the daughters of Lot take advantage of their Father's drunkenness to have sex with him. It explains the emergence of the Moabites and Ammonites (both infamous for sexual sin like Canaanites). But, the sanctions and distaste of the text are nowhere near as strong as the curse of Noah. This points to something worse in Ham's case than just voyeurism.

So, once more humanity splits. Ham's line pursue curse and death, Shem and Japheth's line pursue blessing and life (v.26-27 cf. Luke 3:36).

Study Notes on Genesis

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

God keeps his covenant with creation. The flood seems to function as a historical warning that final judgement is inevitable (Matthew 24:36-44). But, this final judgement will purge the earth through fire rather than destroy it with water (2 Peter 3:1-13 - notice this passage never suggests the destruction of the earth. It is only the ungodly who will be destroyed v.7). The world will emerge through the purging as the place where righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). This stands in contrast to the 'old' world of Noah where humanity's heart was still evil. So, the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven to take up residence in this renewed creation (Rev 21:1-2) where Christ lives with his people.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. In what ways do Christians devalue this creation?
2. How does God's covenant with creation impact the way we live in this world now?
3. How does the ongoing reality of sin in the world until the final judgement temper our answer to 2.?
4. How does Genesis 8-9 enlarge our view of Jesus?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 10:1-11:26

AIM

- To see the grace of God as a response human pride.

CONTEXT

God has judged his world through the flood. The reason for his judgement is the corruption of the human heart through sin (6:5, 12-13). However, he is gracious towards Noah and his family and preserves them through the flood (8:16).

The end of the flood marks another new beginning for humanity - chapter 8 reverses the effects of the flood and alludes back to Genesis 1 (8:1 cf. 1:2). Noah and his family are told once more to be fruitful and to multiply and to fill the earth under the blessing of God (9:1, 7). God establishes an everlasting covenant with the whole of creation following the flood (9:9-11). He promises that he will never again destroy the earth through a flood. The emphasis of the promise seems to be never to *destroy* the earth again. The water was an agent of decreation hence to promise not to flood is a promise not to decreate. God gives a clear indication that this is the case in the sign of the bow (9:16).

But, all is not well. The human heart remains unchanged by the flood (8:21). Violence and death will still be present in the post-flood world albeit regulated by God (9:2-6). This is made concrete in the sin of Ham against his Father. Noah curses Ham and once more humanity divides into a line of blessing (Shem 9:26 cf. Seth in 4:26) and a line of curse (Canaan 9:25 cf. Cain 4:11).

This new section opens up the wider implications of the blessing and the curse as it impacts the whole of humanity.

STRUCTURE

10:1-11:9 Grace abounding...

11:10-26 Grace abounding all the more...

1. GRACE ABOUNDING... (10:1-11:9)

Chapter 10 charts the progress of the three sons of Noah. It's not so much a genealogy as a table of people and nations. How are we to understand its purpose?

- i. There are 70 nations in total suggesting the completeness and unity of humanity (70 - 10x7 - is a number for completeness in Hebrew thought).
- ii. God is sovereign over the nations. He commands them to multiply and fill the earth (9:1) and chapter 10 shows us how it happens. The refrain in verses 5, 20, and 31 emphasises the common experience of the children of the sons of Noah.
- iii. Israel is not mentioned. Her time will come and her relationship to the nations will be made clear (cf. 12:1-3). The table seems to be demonstrating God's concern for the nations outside of Israel.
- iv. There are two places in the table where the author pauses to comment.
 - a. **v.8-12** Gives us a portrait of Nimrod, one of Ham's grandsons. He is described as a 'mighty man' and the phrase 'before the Lord' should be read as an idiom of emphasis rather than as a note of divine approval. The author points us to the fact that, 'The beginning of his kingdom was Babel ... in the land of Shinar' (v.10) which immediately connects him with the narrative of 11:2 and the sin which is found there. Moreover, Nimrod founds Assyria (v.11) one of the ancient enemies of Israel. The line of Ham is bad news!

More generally, the line of Ham produces trouble for God's people. Egypt appears here (v.6) and ultimately the Philistines are produced by it (v.14). The Canaanites produce a line of people opposed to Israel (v.15ff) which includes the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (v.19). Noah's

Study Notes on Genesis

curse (9:25) is being mapped out in front of us.

- b. **v.25** The line of Shem produces Peleg and Joktan. The author tells us that in the days of Peleg, '...the earth was divided.' The phrase is slightly ambiguous. It might refer to the division which occurs following Babel (11:9). Or it might refer to another division between a line of blessing and a line of curse. Joktan's line goes nowhere whereas Peleg's line is significant as we'll see. Maybe it refers to both!

The overall impact of the table is to communicate the unity (10:1 all come from Noah) and diversity (10:32 the nations spreading on the earth) of the human race. This is God's doing. These nations will be significant in God's plan to redeem his world.

The Babel story must be read alongside the table of nations. We have already seen one way the author connects the two sections (cf. v.10). The language of 'dispersal' is also common (cf. 10:18 where it used of the Canaanites and 11:4b and 8, 9b). The story of Babel tells us how the nations came to be dispersed from a position of common language (11:1).

The sin of Babel is a prideful attempt to be God. They want to make a name for themselves in order to prevent their dispersal (v.4). This is contrary to God's purpose that they should multiply and fill the earth. Furthermore, the tower which they build in v.4 is an attempt to penetrate the heavens where God alone dwells ('with its top in the heavens'). These kinds of towers were common among the pagan nations of the Ancient Near East. The top of the tower was seen as the place where heaven met earth and the king, regarded as divine, would be enthroned there.

God's response to the pride of the Babelites is amusing - they try to build a tower 'with its top in the heavens' but it turns out to be so far short that God has to 'come down and see' it (v.5)! He recognises their prideful attempt to usurp him (v.6 cf. 3:22) and consequently judges them. The confusion of language results in their dispersal, the very thing they'd been trying to avoid. God asserts his sovereign authority. But, although this is an act of judgement, it is also an act of grace - God chooses to confound rather than to destroy. He fulfils his purposes to fill the earth even as he judges. There is a future for humanity.

2. GRACE ABOUNDING ALL THE MORE... (11:10-26)

This rumour of grace is confirmed in the genealogy which the author places immediately after the Babel story. He takes us back to the line of Shem, the line of blessing. He follows the line through Peleg rather than Joktan (v.17) and notably, in contrast to Noah's genealogy (5:6ff), does not mention death. The final member of the line is Abram (v.26) who from now on in Genesis and the Bible as a whole will be seen as the source of blessing for the nations of chapter 10 (cf. 12:3). God is gracious!

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. Acts 2:1-13 seems to allude to this part of Genesis. Acts includes a table of nations (v.9-11) and the confusion of languages is reversed. Many languages are no longer a barrier to unity but rather the message of Christ brings a new unity. The structure of Acts sees the nations being brought back together through the gospel (cf. Acts 1:8, 10:34-48). This completes the command of Jesus to make disciples from every nation (Matt 28:19). Ephesians emphasises that through Jesus Christ all things will be united once more (1:10). Revelation 7:9ff looks ahead to the nations gathering before the throne of God.
2. Abram is a key figure in the NT. There are lots of places we could go but Galatians 3:29 tells us that if we belong to Christ then we are Abraham's offspring whatever nation we come from.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. How do the nations strive for unity outside of Jesus Christ?
Is it a bad thing, a good thing or a mixed thing for human beings to do this?
 2. What happens when people emphasise the diversity of the human race to the neglect of its unity?
 3. How does the Gospel allow us to maintain unity and diversity?
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Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 11:27-12:20

AIM

- To see that God's gracious promises require a faithful response.

CONTEXT

The early chapters of Genesis have been marked by God's goodness and grace in the face of human rebellion. However, God is not willing to ignore sin - he must and does judge it.

Most recently this pattern has been seen in the Babel story (11:1-9). Human pride attempts to climb into heaven, to usurp God. God intervenes to confound the languages of the world and to disperse humanity around the earth. Nonetheless, God has not given up on his creation. Humanity is dispersed rather than destroyed and there are rumours of hope as the author focuses on the line of Shem and Peleg once more (11:10-26). Noah has already made clear that this is the line of blessing (9:26) even as it finds its origins in the line of Seth (5:6-32), the other son of blessing. The line of Shem finds its conclusion in the family of Terah (11:26).

The introduction of Abram via the generations of Terah in 11:27 introduces a major section in Genesis which will run until 25:11 when Abram dies. The central concerns of the section will be the promise of land to Abraham (12-15 bookended by the command of 12:1 and the promise of 15:18) and the promise of offspring (16-22 bookended by the statement about Sarah's barrenness in 16:1 and the promise of countless descendants in 22:17).

Throughout the section Abram's faith in God's promises is tested. Sometimes he is seen to fail (12:10-20), sometimes he is seen to succeed (22:1-19) but always God is graciously faithful to his promises.

STRUCTURE

11:27-32 The Need for Grace

12:1-9 The Promise of Grace

12:10-20 The Test of Faith

1. THE NEED FOR GRACE (11:27-32)

The genealogy of Terah serves as an introduction to the whole Abram story.

- i. It establishes the fact that Abram's wife Sarai is barren (11:30). God will promise to make Abram into a great nation (12:2) so we are introduced to the need for God's supernatural intervention in Abram's life if the promise is to be fulfilled. Sarai's barrenness will be a test of Abram's faith - will he trust God to produce an heir for him or not?
- ii. The names of the places where Terah and his family settle (Ur and Haran) were both centres for the worship of the moon god. Abram comes from a family of idol worshippers (even though he stands in the line of Seth and Shem). Joshua 24:2 confirms this assessment. Therefore, Abram is not looking for God. God graciously looks for him and calls him.
- iii. Abram is on his way to what will become the land of promise (Canaan v.31) but stops short to settle in Haran. He needs the promise and call of God in order to fulfil his destiny.

Hence, the genealogy of Terah points us to God's sovereign, gracious initiative in calling and blessing Abram.

2. THE PROMISE OF GRACE (12:1-9)

Chapter 12 begins with the gracious call of God on Abram's life (v.1). It comes from 'nowhere' as if to stress God's sovereignty in choosing this man. The idea of travelling to a land which God will show him becomes a major motif of the whole Bible (Israel in one way or another spends the whole OT trying to get to or back to

Study Notes on Genesis

the land of promise; the NT describes the Christian as heading to the final land of promise, the heavenly city).

God makes Abram a sevenfold promise in verses 2-3 (seven being a number of completion and perfection in Hebrew thought). Again, the seven promises control the Genesis narrative from here on but also become the narrative heart of the whole Bible. We are left asking, "how will God do this?" The promises stand in contrast to the preceding section - the Babelites tried to make a name for themselves (11:4) whereas here God promises to make a great name for Abram (2). Moreover, the nations are dispersed as an act of judgement in 11:9 whereas though Abram the nations will be blessed. All that the Babelites tried to accomplish independently of God will be accomplished by God. God's purposes, even while they narrow down to one man at this point, still remain universal - all the families of the earth will be blessed (12:3b).

God's promises always come with a call to trust and obey (12:1) and Abram responds in faith in v.4. He sets out for the land of Canaan (v.4-5). In verse 7 God gives him the other big promise of the OT i.e. to give him and his offspring the land of Canaan. Once more Abram responds in faith - on two occasions he builds altars (v. 7-8, both probably in sites used for pagan worship). We're told that Abram, "... called upon the name of the Lord" which immediately situates him in the line of Seth as it recalls 4:26. God's gracious promises and Abram's faithful response to the promises represent hope for humanity.

3. THE TEST OF FAITH (12:10-20)

This next section is a narrative which in one form or another echoes through Genesis and the Bible (Joseph will go down to Egypt - 39:1, his brothers and Father will go to Egypt following a famine - 43:1ff, Jesus will go down to Egypt - Matt 2:13-15). Egypt in the Bible is often a place of safety but also a place of testing (ultimately Egypt, even though a Son of Ham [10:6], is caught up into God's gracious plans for the nations - see Isaiah 19:25).

Abram enters Egypt looking to preserve his own life by encouraging Sarai to lie (v.13). Implicit within this action is a lack of faith in God's promises. If God has promised to make Abram into a great nation with a great name (v.2) then is He really likely to allow Abram to die childless in Egypt? Abram chooses to try and fulfil the promises without God (cf. 16:1-16).

But, God is faithful, despite Abram's lack of faith. He intervenes and is faithful to his promise of 12:3 - Abram has been dishonoured by the Pharaoh so God visits curses on the Egyptian ruler (v.17). Abram comes up out of Egypt through God's gracious intervention (once more anticipating a greater deliverance of God's people from Egypt).

Therefore, the Egyptian interlude functions at a variety of levels.

- i. It is a test of faith for Abram (which he fails) but also a test of the faithfulness of God (which he passes). This pattern will recur in Genesis.
- ii. The pattern recurs in the rest of the Bible too - on each occasion God keeps his promise.
- iii. It teaches us that the life of faith is complex. Ultimately our faith is on God not in our faith or else we're lost.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. **Matthew 2:13-15** - Jesus is **the** one who goes down to Egypt and is brought out by God's faithfulness. God does this since Jesus is **the** offspring promised to Abram (Galatians 3:16). He keep his promise to Abram in Jesus.
2. **Galatians 3:7-9** - All the nations of the earth are blessed in Jesus Christ as they place their faith in him.
3. **Hebrews 11:8-10** - Abram is **the** example to the Christian of what it means to walk with '... the assurance of things not hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.' (Heb 11:1). His faith in the divine architect and urban planner kept him obedient.

Study Notes on Genesis

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. If my future is uncertain then to what things or people do I look for security? How can I look more in faith to the promises of God fulfilled in Jesus?
2. How do the promises of God to Abram challenge our narrow views of the church and its task?
3. How does the Egyptian incident challenge superficial views of the life of faith? How does it encourage us? Warn us?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 13:1-14:24

AIM

- To see God blessing Abram as he walks the life of faith.

CONTEXT

The focus of Genesis has narrowed down from the whole universe in chapter 1 to one man in chapter 12. God's purposes for his world will not be thwarted - he promises that through Abram the families of the earth will once more be blessed (12:3 cf. 1:28).

However, God makes it clear that all this is because of his sovereign grace. He chooses a man who cannot have children (11:30) and promises to make him into a great nation (12:2). He remains committed to Abram and the promises he has made to him even when Abram proves faithless in Egypt (12:10-20). God is putting Abram through a school of faith which will grow more and more testing until the climax in chapter 22.

Chapters 13 and 14 provide us with more evidence of Abram's growing faith in God. The author of Genesis provides us with a series of incidents that demonstrate that Abram is back on track after the diversion in Egypt. However, he is the main character in this section. We will see that it is Abram's devotion to **God** which brings about his well being and blessing in these chapters. God keeps his promises to bless him.

STRUCTURE

13:1-18 Living by faith not sight

14:1-16 Living by faith not might

1. LIVING BY FAITH NOT BY SIGHT (13:1-18)

The geographical detail of verse 1 marks not only a change in Abram's physical state but also in his spiritual state. He now leaves Egypt, the site of spiritual failure, and for the next couple of chapters exemplifies the life of faith.

The writer marks this change of spiritual state in a number of ways:

- i. We're told that Abram was, '... very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold.' Material blessings are often a sign of God's favour in the OT (cf. Job 42:10-17) although their absence is not necessarily a sign of God's disfavour.
- ii. Abram ends up back in Bethel (cf. 12:8) and once more calls on the name of the Lord (13:4).
- iii. The chapter ends at Hebron with another altar to the Lord being built (13:18).

The incident in between the two altars (v.5-17) shows us Abram actively believing God's promise that he will give his offspring a land (12:7).

A conflict arises between Abram and his nephew Lot. The writer of Genesis has carefully made clear that Lot is not Abram's offspring - he is Abram's 'brother's son' (12:5). Hence, as successive chapters show, he cannot be the one through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed.

The basic issue is the use of land not extensive enough to sustain both families and their livestock (v.5-7). It is Abram who takes the initiative to resolve the problem (v.8) and he does so by giving Lot the priority of choice in the new land (v.9). There are a number of indicators that Lot does not choose the way of blessing:

- i. He depends on his eyesight (v.10) rather than on the promise of God (cf. Heb 11:1).
 - ii. The land he chooses is likened to the garden of the Lord (from which mankind had been banished and cursed) and the land of Egypt (where Abram had met with spiritual failure). Moreover, the writer knowingly stresses the fact that the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are in the area Lot chooses (v.10b, 12, 13).
 - iii. Lot heads east, a direction associated with curse in Genesis (cf. 4:16).
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Study Notes on Genesis

Abram in contrast is prepared to trust God enough to allow Lot the priority of choice. His lack of faith in God's promises meant he allowed the Pharaoh to take Sarai - he chose to be in control rather than to trust God. Here he gives up control of the land in order to trust God.

The conclusion of the incident confirms this reading. In verses 14-17 God reaffirms to Abram the promise of the land and the promise of offspring. Abram's willingness faithfully to give up control means that God reassures him that he will be blessed.

The section also fulfils the function of carrying on the distinction between the line of blessing and the line of curse. This distinction finds its conclusion in the sordid events of Genesis 19:30-38 where Lot unwittingly fathers Israel's great enemies, the Moabites and the Ammonites (Nonetheless the distinction is not absolute since 2 Peter 2:7 describes Lot as a righteous man).

2. LIVING BY FAITH NOT BY MIGHT (!!) (14:1-16)

The early part of chapter 14 describes a military conflict which results in Lot (again pointedly referred to as the son of Abram's brother v. 12) being captured and kidnapped. The incident is notable for being the first account of city-states warring in Genesis - the dislocation of sin is being worked out at this level too.

The kings listed in verses 9 presumably represent a formidable alliance with formidable armies at their disposal. The writer makes sure we know that Abram defeats them with 318 of his own men (v.14). He defeats them, pursues them and rescues Lot and all his household and possessions. On the face of it Abram has won a great battle.

Verses 17-24 act as a commentary on the action which has preceded them and reveal a very different perspective. The verses contain two encounters:

- i. Between Abram and the king of Sodom (v. 17 and v.21-24). The king of Sodom wants to do a deal - he keeps the people and Abram keeps the goods. Abram's response in v.22 is unequivocal - he will not do a deal since he does not want to attribute his wealth to the king of Sodom. The implication is that he recognises his wealth to be from God (v.22).
- ii. Between Abram and Melchizedek (v. 18-20). Melchizedek appears from nowhere and disappears as quickly. He is a king-priest of God most high (incidentally indicating that true worship was happening beyond the bounds of Abram's family and true priesthood can exist beyond the bounds of the Aaronic line). He blesses Abram on behalf of God and in his blessing makes clear that it is God who has won the battle (v.20). Abram pays him homage as gives him a tenth of everything (v.20b).

The author chooses to put this encounter between the two halves of Abram's encounter with the king of Sodom to show that the victory was God's. It also shows that Abram's response to the king was based on this knowledge.

So, God is the hero of this section. He fights on behalf of Abram even as Abram trusts him.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. Faith as exemplified by Abram is a life of "...the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (**Hebrews 11:1**). Faith is trusting the promises of God even when the future is uncertain. God keeps his promises.
2. Abram's homage to Melchizedek anticipates our homage to one after the order of Melchizedek - the Lord Jesus Christ. He not only blesses us and points us to God's deliverance but actually is the source of God's blessing and deliverance (**Hebrews 5:5-10**).

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. How do we respond when the future is uncertain?
In what ways do we try and control our own destinies in these circumstances?
What does it look like to trust God's promises when we face these circumstances?
 2. How does Christ being in the order of Melchizedek encourage us to live the life of faith?
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Study Notes on Genesis

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 15:1-17:26

AIM

- To understand God's covenant with Abram and to see his faithfulness to it in action.

CONTEXT

Genesis continues to focus on the life of Abram. God has made great promises to Abram (12:1-7) and has gained a variable response from Abram. The failure to trust God's promises in Egypt is followed by acts of strong faith as he splits the land with Lot and rescues Lot from hostile kings (13-14).

However, Abram is no nearer seeing the promises of chapter 12 fulfilled. He has no offspring and he does not fully possess the land. Chapters 15-17 represent a period of questioning, faithlessness and ultimately faith on Abram's part. But, more importantly, they also record an intensification of God's commitment to Abram and his promises to him.

These chapters are central to the whole Bible and shape much of the theology of the NT. God's gracious covenant with Abram is the one which all other covenants look to in the Scriptures. It will find its final fulfilment in the new covenant Christ inaugurates.

STRUCTURE

15:1-21 God Cuts the Covenant

16:1-15 Abram forgets the Covenant

17:1-26 God Intensifies the Covenant

1. GOD CUTS THE COVENANT (15:1-21)

Chapter 15 is joined thematically to chapter 14 by the idea of 'reward'. Abram has made a point at the end of chapter 14 of refusing to do a deal with the King of Sodom which would have given him a 'reward'. God responds to this act of faith at the start of chapter 15 by reassuring him that he is his God and will ensure that he is rewarded (15:1).

Verses 2-9 are a remarkable dialogue of faith. Abram hears God's word about a great reward (v.1) but understandably is perplexed by it. In verses 2-3 he questions God about his lack of offspring and in v.8 he questions God about his lack of a land. Abram requests confirmation.

God responds in two ways which are intimately joined:

- i. He gives Abram his word of promise in v.4-5 (backed up by the visual aid of the stars). Abram believes this word and God counts his faith as righteousness. The principle of justification through faith not works is made explicit.
- ii. He makes or literally 'cuts' (v.18) a covenant with Abram. The scene of verses 9-18 is not unique in many respects. Ancient covenants followed the pattern of cutting animals in half. Both parties making the covenant would then walk between the pieces as a sign of self-malediction i.e. if I break the covenant then let me be torn in half like these animals. The remarkable thing about this covenant cutting ceremony is that Abram is sleeping - he does not pass between the parts. God alone (symbolised by the smoke and fire of v.17 cf. Ex 13:21) passes between the parts. God is totally committed to keeping his promises to Abram despite future appearances to the contrary when his offspring are afflicted for four hundred years (v.13). God will give him a land and offspring or else God will be torn apart.

At the heart of the covenant is God's word of promise by which he binds himself to Abram.

2. ABRAM FORGETS THE COVENANT (16:1-15)

It is hard to imagine a more graphic demonstration of God's total commitment to keeping his promises to

Study Notes on Genesis

Abram than chapter 15. Abram seems to have grasped the principle of grace as he responds in faith (15:6).

However, chapter 16 sees Abram failing to believe that God will sovereignly keep his promise. He tries to force its fulfilment under the influence of his wife. There are two scenes in chapter 16:

- i. **Between Sarai and Abram (v.1-6).** Sarai comes up with a scheme for generating a child - Abram is to sleep with his servant woman Hagar. We are told she is Egyptian (v. 1 and therefore not of the line of promise cf. 10:6). Abram listens to 'the voice of Sarai' in contrast to chapter 15 where he listened to the voice of God and believed him (15:1-6). The sin of departing from faith leads to relational disruption - Hagar looks on Sarai with contempt (v.4) and Sarai turns on Abram (v.5). Abram for his part washes his hands of Hagar and her child and turns them over to Sarai for disposal (v.6).
- ii. **Between Hagar and the angel of the Lord (v.7-16).** The angel as God's messenger reflects God's tender compassion to Hagar as well as his fierce commitment to his promise. Hagar recognises God's care for her in v.13. God remembers his promise to multiply the offspring of Abram and commits himself to multiplying Hagar's offspring (v.10). However, Ishmael is not the son of the promise so he will be in constant conflict with those around him (v.12).

3. GOD INTENSIFIES THE COVENANT (17:1-26)

Once more it would be easy to assume that Abram has blown it once and for all. But chapter 17 marks a further intensification of God's covenant with him. God does this in a variety of ways:

- i. He not only reaffirms the promises to Abram but expands them in the following new ways (v.1-8):
 - Abram will be the Father of a multitude of nations and has a change of name to confirm it (v.4-5).
 - kings will come from him (v.6).
 - the covenant will be an everlasting covenant through all generations of his offspring (v.7).
 - the land will be an everlasting possession (v.8).
 - God will be God to him and his offspring (v.7b and v.8b).
- ii. He gives Abraham and his male offspring the mark of circumcision as a sign of this covenant (v.9-14). The administration of circumcision becomes a sign that Abraham and his offspring are keeping covenant with God.
- iii. He makes the specific promise of a son for Sarai whose name is also to be changed to indicate God's intention to bless her (v.15-21). God expresses his continuing commitment to Ishmael but makes explicit that Ishmael is not the son of the covenant promise. Watch Isaac to see God keep his covenant.

The chapter ends with Abraham faithfully keeping covenant with God as he and the males within his household are circumcised (v.22-27). God's generous grace demands a response of faith.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. The principle of justification by faith established through Abraham is central to the way God deals with sinners. The sign of circumcision, while important, was not the thing which saved him. Hence, uncircumcised Gentiles can be saved too. (**Romans 4:1-12**).
 2. Circumcision is not unimportant. God always intended it to be an outward sign of an inward reality. God's desire was that through faith his people's hearts would be circumcised, set apart to him. In fact he assures his people that he will perform this spiritual work on them (cf. Deuteronomy 10:6). **Colossians 2:11-15** tells us that God has done this work through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism is now the sign in the new covenant that he has done this and we express our commitment to keep covenant with God through it.
 3. The covenant with Abraham finds its ultimate fulfilment in the new Jerusalem - listen to the echo of Genesis 17:7-8 in **Revelation 21:1-4**. This is God's people with their God in the eternal land of
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Study Notes on Genesis

promise, the renewed heavens and earth.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. How does God's covenant sustain our faith? What does it teach us about God?
2. When we sin how does God's covenant reassure us that we are not lost?
3. What are the covenant signs God has given us now and what role do they play in our faith? How do we give them their proper place?

GENESIS 18:1-19:38

AIM

- To keep the way of the Lord since the Lord is righteous and just.

CONTEXT

God has committed himself to Abraham. He has given him his word of promise in an increasingly intensive form (12:1-3, 7, 13:14-17, 15:4-5, 18, 17:1-8). Also, he has given Abraham various visual aids to support the word of promise (e.g. the stars in 15:5). The promises reach a climax in chapter 17 with the promise of a son by Sarah who is to be called Isaac (17:19). God makes clear that the covenant will be established with him and not Ishmael (17:19-21).

Moreover, God has given Abraham increasing assurances that he intends to keep his promise by structuring the promise through a covenant relationship (chapter 15). He gives Abraham and his offspring the sign of circumcision to show that they will keep covenant with him (chapter 17).

Abraham, for his part, has been invited to respond in faith. He demonstrates a mixed record - he acts faithlessly in his dealings with the Pharaoh (12:10-20) and with Hagar (16:1-6). But, faithfully in his dealings with Lot and the kings of the region (13:1-14:24). Abraham is obedient to God's command to circumcise the males within his household (17:22-26). Despite his mixed response, Abraham's basic stance is summarised in 15:6 - 'he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness'.

Chapter 17 has ended with Abraham's act of faith in circumcising his household. Chapters 18-19 present Abraham in a favourable light using Lot and his actions as a foil. The controlling verse of the section seems to be 18:19 - we see Abraham acting in righteousness and justice throughout (whereas Lot's actions are far more ambiguous). But, more than that, we see God working in righteousness and justice throughout - this is his way.

STRUCTURE

18:1-33 The righteousness and justice of Abraham

19:1-38 The righteousness and justice of God

1. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE OF ABRAHAM (18:1-33)

The author seems to set up a deliberate contrast between Abraham (A) and Lot (L)

- A sits in the door of his tent (18:1), L sits in the gate of Sodom (19:1).
- A encounters three men (18:2), L encounters 2 angels (19:1).
- A and L both bow to the earth on meeting them (18:2, 19:1).
- Both provide hospitality for their visitors although A's is significantly more lavish than L's (18:4-8, 19:3).
- A encounters the mercy of God (18:9-15), L encounters the judgement of God albeit tempered by mercy (19:12-22).
- A's words are effective (18:22-33) whereas L's words are ineffective (19:14).

The point of this contrast is to place the spotlight on Abraham as a faithful follower of God. The divine visitor brings news of the fulfilment of the promise (18:14) whereas, through the angels, he brings news of judgement to Lot. This contrast has its roots in chapter 13 where Abraham goes the way of faith whereas Lot goes the way of vision and chooses what he thinks is the best of the land.

God chooses not to hide his will from Abraham (18:17). This disclosure of the divine will is characteristic of the way God deals with the prophets (e.g. Jer 23:16-22, Amos 3:7). God indicates that he is about to tell Abraham what he will do to Sodom since he has chosen him "...that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice..."

Study Notes on Genesis

Verses 22-33 demonstrate Abraham keeping the way of the Lord as he pleads with God to act in a righteous and just way towards Sodom. God is the Judge of the whole world (18:25) and hence can be relied on to act justly. Abraham's point is that it would contradict the divine character to destroy the righteous and the wicked together (18:25).

So, does Abraham's intercession on behalf of Sodom change God's mind? There is no suggestion that God intended to destroy the righteous with the wicked. In fact 18:19 makes it clear that this not his way. The exchange between Abraham and God is designed more to show us Abraham keeping the way of the Lord. It demonstrates his covenantal commitment to righteousness and justice. He is a prophet of God (20:7) who intercedes on behalf of the people reminding God of his own nature. It reveals the righteousness and justice of God (he will not destroy the righteous) as well as the righteousness and justice of Abraham.

2. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE OF GOD (19:1-38)

The Lot narrative sees God's righteousness and justice in action - he destroys the wicked and delivers the righteous. Lot is righteous (he protects his angelic visitors (19:7) and is counted worthy of deliverance from judgement (19:15 cf. 2 Peter 2:7)). However, he is presented in a far more ambiguous light than Abraham:

- His hospitality is less lavish (v.3).
- He offers his daughters in exchange for the life of the visitors (v.8).
- His sons-in-law think he's a joker (v.14).
- He lingers in Sodom even when told to leave (v.16).
- He'd rather escape to Zoar than the safety of the hills (v.19-22).
- His wife ends up as a pillar of salt since she disobediently looks back to Sodom (v.26).
- He ends up fearfully living in a cave (v.30), surely an ironic commentary on his decision to take the best of the land in chapter 13.
- His daughters sleep with him and bear him sons who will be the enemies of God's people (v.30-38).

The emphasis of the story is on God's merciful rescue of Lot (19:16) and his judgement against Sodom (19:13, 23-25). In both cases God does what he does since 'he remembers Abraham' (v.29). Abraham has acted righteously and justly. So has God

Excursus: what was the sin of Sodom?

The example we are given in Genesis 19 is the request of the men of Sodom for the angelic visitors (v.5). Some argue that the sin is a violation of hospitality. It is at least that - a great offence in the ancient world - but the nature of the violation is deeper. The men of Sodom ask for the men since they want to have sex with them ('know' in v.5 usually has a sexual sense in the rest of the OT cf. Gen 4:1 and the reaction of Lot by offering his virgin daughters instead confirms this).

It is then sometimes argued that what is in view here is rape - again this is true. But, given the general disapproval of homosexual activity within the ancient world, the fact that it is homosexual rape compounds the sin. Again Lot's willingness to offer his daughters indicates this - rape is always terrible but the narrative suggests that heterosexual rape is somehow more 'acceptable'. Moreover, 2 Peter 2:7-10 and Jude 7 point to the sexual nature of Sodom's sin - immorality not rape is the issue here. Also, the word 'abomination' used in the singular in Ezek 16:50, is a technical term used in the OT for homosexual practice cf. Lev 18:22.

However, Scripture is also clear that Sodom's sin was not just sexual. Sodom exemplifies the sins of social oppression (Isa 1:10-17) adultery, lying and helping evil (Jer 23:14) and pride, greed and social injustice (Ezek 16:49).

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. Look at Luke 17:22-37, 2 Peter 2:4-10, Jude 5-7. All of them use Sodom and Gomorrah as both a warning that God will judge wickedness and an encouragement that God '...knows how to rescue the godly from trials...'

Study Notes on Genesis

2. Abraham who was justified by faith (Gene 15:6) was nonetheless chosen (with his offspring) to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice (18:19). James 2:14-26, 5:1-11 presses home this connection between justification by faith and doing righteousness and justice.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. In what ways do we water down the judgement of the wicked?
2. How can we take judgement of the wicked more seriously?
3. In what ways do we forget the mercy of God? How can we rely on it more?
4. In what ways do we forget to do righteousness and justice?
5. In what practical ways can we keep the way of the Lord in this area as justified believers?

GENESIS 20:1-22:19

AIM

- To see God's total and utter commitment to the fulfilment of his covenant promises requires a response of total and utter faith from us.

CONTEXT

God's righteousness and justice have been displayed in his destruction of wicked Sodom in chapter 19. But, his mercy towards Lot has also been demonstrated. God cannot destroy the righteous with the wicked. His way is to do righteousness and justice (cf. 18:19).

Abraham shows himself to be a man who keeps the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. He pleads on behalf of the righteous in Sodom and reminds God of his essential nature as a Judge who will do right (18:25).

Chapters 18-19 have served also to demonstrate the difference between Abraham and Lot. Lot is righteous but in a decidedly ambiguous way (see notes on chapters 18-19). However, Abraham is the one chosen by God to command his children to keep the way of the Lord (18:19); Abraham is the one to whom is promised a son (18:10, 14). God has chosen to make his covenant with this man and no other.

Chapters 20-22 mark the climax of Abraham's life story. He receives the promised child and a partial stake in the Promised Land. He undergoes the ultimate test of faith and passes it. We see God committing himself totally and completely to the covenant.

STRUCTURE

20:1-18 A failure of faith

21:1-34 An encouragement to faith

22:1-19 The triumph of faith

1. A FAILURE OF FAITH (20:1-18)

Once again we see a repeated pattern in Abraham's life so far - great faithfulness is followed by great faithlessness. His encounter with Abimelech in many ways mirrors his encounter with Pharaoh in chapter 12. Abraham passes Sarah off as his sister since he is fearful of King Abimelech (20:2, 11-13 cf. 12:11-13). These two incidents are placed immediately after God's promise of offspring in chapter 12 and immediately before God's fulfilment of that promise in chapter 21. Therefore, both act as reminders of the grace of God to sinful humans like Abraham.

In many ways Abimelech is an innocent party duped by Abraham. He is clearly a God-fearer (he communicates with God in an attitude of deference) who once more acts as a foil to Abraham's faithlessness (note the irony of v.11 - Abimelech shows more fear of God in his responses than Abraham has in his actions!).

The overall significance of the incident is to tell us something about God. Once more God is righteous and just - adultery demands punishment (v.3) but it is God who has kept Abimelech from sleeping with Sarah (v.6). Once more the appeal is made for God to act justly and not to destroy the innocent (v.4 cf. 18:25). Abimelech shows superior integrity to Abraham yet God still honours Abraham - Abraham must pray for Abimelech if he and his country are to be delivered (v.7, 17-18). This divine stance to Abraham reinforces that Abraham is who he is by sovereign grace.

The final irony in the story is that God opens the wombs of Abimelech's house for the sake of a woman whose womb he has not yet opened. The chapter ends on a note of suspense. When will God open Sarah's womb?

Study Notes on Genesis

2. AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO FAITH (21:1-34)

The answer is soon! Note the emphasis on God's faithfulness in the simple account of v.1 - he visits Sarah, '... as he said... as he had promised.' Abraham responds in obedience calling the child Isaac (cf. 17:19) and circumcising him on the eighth day (cf. 17:10). There is a note of rejoicing from Sarah (v.6-7) - this is God's doing, he has kept his promises!

However, the bulk of the chapter is taken up with Hagar and Ishmael (8-21). The account serves two functions:

- i. It emphasises again that it is through Isaac, not Ishmael, that Abraham's offspring will be named (v.12). Even though Ishmael is the physical offspring of Abraham, he is not the supernatural child of the promise.

The incident in v.15-21 mirrors the climactic incident of chapter 22 - both Hagar and Abraham contemplate the death of their sons, both hear an angelic voice from heaven, both are given provision to keep their children alive. But, it is only Isaac through whom the covenant will be fulfilled.

- ii. It demonstrates the common grace of God to all that he has made. God preserves and keeps Ishmael and Hagar. He keeps his promise to make Abraham's offspring into a great nation (v.18) even though for Ishmael this will not be a spiritual reality.

The twinning of Isaac and Ishmael is part of the bigger pattern in Genesis of two men, one representing the line of promise, the other not (cf. Cain and Abel, Seth and Lamech, Shem and Ham).

The final encounter between Abraham and Abimelech in v.25-34 once more emphasises Abimelech's integrity (v.v.22-24, 26). Abraham makes a covenant with him which secures for him a well (v.30). He has a stake in the Promised Land.

3. THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH (22:1-19)

One would imagine that Abraham's story would climax with the birth of Isaac. But it does not. God decides to test Abraham's faith (v.1) in order to see how much he fears him (v.12).

We naturally recoil from this story. The writer wants us to know how awful a thing it was (e.g. note the pathos of v.2a). But there are a number of things to bear in mind as we read it:

- i. The last few chapters have stressed that God acts righteously and justly. Hence his character has not suddenly changed.
- ii. God is God - we are not. We cannot put him in a box or dictate how he should act. A God who is not 'dangerous' is no God at all.
- iii. This is a one off incident with eternal significance.

The scene functions as a final seal on the covenant relationship between Abraham and God. Since Abraham has proved himself faithful, God now swears by himself that he will bless him (22:15). The promise of chapter 12 which has been structured by the covenant of chapter 15 and signed by circumcision in chapter 17 is now finally sealed by God's self-oath. God will be faithful.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. **Hebrews 6:13-20** argues that God's unchangeable promise and oath are encouragements to us to hold fast to the hope set before us. Jesus the fulfilment of the promise and oath has gone into heaven on our behalf. He anchors our soul.
2. **Hebrews 11:17-19** Abraham's faith in God is an example to us. He so believed God's promise that he reasoned God would raise Isaac from the dead.
3. **Galatians 4:21-31**. Hagar represents all those who live in slavery to the law rather than faith in the gospel. Sarah represents the latter. So - be free!

Study Notes on Genesis

THINKING IT THROUGH

- How does the story of Abraham and Isaac encourage us to hold fast to the hope set before us?
- In what areas does it stretch our faith today?
- How does the story of Hagar and Sarah encourage us to choose the freedom of the gospel?
- How does Abraham's faithlessness and God faithfulness encourage us in our walk with God?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 23:1-25:18

AIM

- To see the sovereign providence of God at work among Abraham's offspring.

CONTEXT

The story of the generations of Abraham (or Terah, his father) which began at 11:27 is drawing to a close. We have witnessed in Abraham the ups and downs of the life of faith. There have been moments of great faithfulness (12:1-4, 13:1-18, 14:17-24, 15:6, 17:22-27, 18:22-33, 22:1-24) and moments of great unfaithfulness (12:10-20, 16:1-6, 20:1-13).

However, the frailties of Abraham have acted as a foil for the faithfulness of God. He has made promises of offspring and land to Abraham (12:1-7) which he has structured via a covenant (15:1-21), signed by circumcision (17:1-14) and ultimately sealed through swearing by himself (22:16-18 cf. Heb 6:13-20).

The incident where God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the son of the promise, serves as a climax to the story of Abraham. God demonstrates his total commitment to the covenant promises (22:16) and Abraham responds in wholehearted faith, reasoning that God can raise the dead (Heb 11:17-19).

Chapters 23:1-25:18 are transitional chapters where Abraham's successors are moved centre stage. Once more God is the main actor securing the elect line.

STRUCTURE

23:1-20 The land...

24:1-67 The son...

25:1-18 The offspring

1. THE LAND... (23:1-20)

The central narrative concern of the chapter is the death of Sarah and the provision of a suitable grave for her. However, the central theological concern of the chapter is the promise of the land to Abraham and his offspring. The writer makes this clear in a number of ways:

- i. He emphasises that Abraham does his property deal with the Hittites, the people of the land (v.7) who are mentioned no less than 9 times). Hittite is Hebrew for sons of Heth, who was the son of Canaan (10:15). Noah has cursed Canaan to be a servant of the line of promise (9:24-27). God has explicitly promised that Abraham's offspring will be given the land of the Hittites (15:18-21).
- ii. The elaborate negotiations make clear that Abraham owns the field of Machpelah. The offer of the gift of the field (v.11) is graciously rejected by Abraham in favour of its purchase (v.13). The writer stresses that Abraham owns the field (v.17-20).

Hence, there is irony in the story of chapter 23 - Canaan does serve the line of promise in the provision of a cave and a field but the line of promise only has a cave and a field in the Promised Land. Abraham ends his life as a sojourner and foreigner in the Promised Land albeit with a taste of what is to come (23:4). Abraham lives in faith that God will fulfil his promises.

2. THE WIFE... (24:1-67)

Abraham ends his life under the blessing of God (24:1) but is concerned to make provision of a wife for Isaac via his servant (v.2-4). This is not just an old man wanting to see his children happily married before he dies. Rather this fits into God's larger promise to bless the nations of the earth through Abraham. The possibility of offspring for Isaac is therefore a central concern (cf. 24:60).

Furthermore, Sarah has just died. Matriarchs, not just patriarchs are important in the Genesis story (indeed the whole Bible story climaxing with Mary). Hence, the provisions of a wife for Isaac is crucial. Rebekah as

Study Notes on Genesis

successor for Sarah is emphasised in 24:67 - where Rebekah is taken into the tent of Sarah and Isaac finds comfort in her following his mother's death.

The story is given extraordinary prominence - it is the single longest episode in Genesis. The author wants us to know that there will be physical and spiritual life beyond Abraham. The covenant will continue. The torch of faith and promise now passes from Abraham and Sarah to Isaac and Rebekah. This explains Abraham's insistence that Isaac's wife should not come from the 'people of the land' (v.3). The line of promise must be kept pure and undefiled.

The story is full of dramatic tension and romantic delight. These things all serve to highlight God's role in the discovery of a wife for Isaac.

- There is a consistent emphasis on God's steadfast love to Abraham and his offspring (v.12, 14, 27).
- God's providential arrangement of the encounter between Abraham's servant and Rebekah is stressed (v.7, 12-14, 21, 26-27, 42-43, 48-49).
- God's blessing of Abraham (v.1, 34) is reflected in the blessing of Rebekah by her family (v.60) and it is specifically a blessing related to children as per God's promise.

Therefore, the story of the discovery of Rebekah tells us that God is in control. Sarah is dead, Abraham is old but God is still working his purposes out in delightful ways. The succession is secure and God will keep his covenant.

3.THE OFFSPRING ... (25:1-18)

This section highlights the unique place Isaac has in God's purposes. It throws the spotlight on Abraham's other offspring via Keturah, Hagar and his concubines.

- i. Sons of Keturah. After detailing their names (v.1-4) the writer tells us that Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. Isaac is the supernatural son of promise.
- ii. Sons of the concubines (the OT has a certain ambivalence towards polygamy - monogamy appears to be God's ideal [cf. Gen 2:24 and 1 Tim 3:2] but polygamy is at least tolerated, sometimes even it is a sign of blessing [cf. 2 Sam 3:1-5]). Here the point is clear - the sons are sent away from Isaac, '... eastward to the east country.' (East is generally negative in Genesis cf. 3:24, 4:16).
- iii. Sons of Hagar. Even though Ishmael buries Abraham with Isaac (v.9) thus revealing his privileged position, he nonetheless settles near Egypt and Assyria (again negative triggers) and settled over against his kinsmen (v.18). He is not the son of the promise.

Thus, the stage is cleared for Isaac through whom God will now work his purposes.

CONNECTING WITH THE NT

Romans 8:28 God's sovereign providence remains at work in the life of the believer.

THINKING IT THROUGH

- How do we see God sovereignly ordering events of our lives?
- What are the dangers in trying to 'read' God's providence in the world and our lives?
- How can we responsibly thank God for his providence at the time of his providence (rather than years after the events)?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 25:19-28:9

AIM

- To see that God's election of a people is all of grace not works or ethnicity.

CONTEXT

The narrative of Terah's generations, centred on Abraham and begun at 11:27, has come to a close in 25:11 with Abraham's death. It has been the story of God's unwavering commitment to his covenant promises and Abraham's wavering response to those same promises. God will once more bless the world following the curse after the Fall.

There is a brief interlude to recount the generations of Ishmael (25:12-18) which is designed to show that God keeps his promise to bless Ishmael with offspring (cf. 21:18) but also that he is not the son of the promise.

The early part of chapter 25 has stressed that Isaac is the son of the promise - Abraham gives him all that he has (25:5) and after Abraham's death we are told that, "God blessed Isaac his son." (25:11).

However, after the extended narrative of the search for a suitable wife for Isaac in chapter 24, the author of Genesis jumps over the rest of his life and cuts straight to his old age. We're not explicitly told why but the author hints at a reason when he tells us, "Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game..." Given the way the story will unfold this suggests that Isaac has lost sight of God's bigger purposes. The main players in these chapters will be Jacob and Esau.

STRUCTURE

25:19:28 The Struggle Prophesied

25:29-34 The Struggle Commenced

26:1-34 Isaac Is Still the One

27:1-40 The Struggle Continues

27:41-28:9 Jacob Is the One

1. THE STRUGGLE PROPHESED (25:19:28)

The conception of Jacob and Esau follows the pattern of the conception of Isaac. Rebekah, like Sarah before her, is barren (cf. 11:30 and 25:21). God miraculously intervenes to enable her to conceive (v.21b). The point of both conceptions is to stress God's sovereignty - the blessing cannot come to pass unless he is at work.

The twins struggle in her womb so she asks God why this is the case (v.22). The reply in v.23 sets the agenda for the following chapters and in many ways for the whole of salvation history. The two boys will become two nations and the usual order will be overturned - the older will serve the younger. God's gracious purposes overturn the normal order of the world. He works on the basis of grace.

The boys' names in v.25-26 reflect their natures and the manner of the birth of Jacob reflects his later actions. Isaac's love of Esau contradicts God's prophecy that he will serve Jacob. Rebekah lines up behind the son who has been chosen. Again, this will have repercussions later in the story.

2. THE STRUGGLE COMMENCED (25:29-34)

Neither son acts well in this incident. Esau despises his birthright (v.34b) and is prepared to sell it for a bowl of stew. Jacob is prepared to exploit his brother's hunger. However, the prophecy of v.23 is being worked out - the rights of the older son have now been transferred to the younger. In God's purposes Jacob becomes the son of promise where the natural order specifies it should be Esau. God's ways are not our ways.

Study Notes on Genesis

3. ISAAC IS STILL THE ONE (26:1-34)

Chapter 26 at first sight seems to be an anomaly interrupting the flow of the struggles between Jacob and Esau. But, it strongly parallels incidents in the life of Abraham:

- Both receive the promises of God that they will receive the land and offspring (12:1-7, 26:1-5)
- Both try to pass off their wives as their sisters out of fear of Abimelech (20:1-2, 26:6-8)
- Both become rich in Abimelech's land (20:14ff, 26:12-16)
- Both dig wells in Abimelech's land (21:25ff, 26:17ff)
- Both establish covenants with Abimelech and Phicol (21:22-34, 26:26-33) at Beersheba.

In the middle of the action, God again affirms that he is with Isaac for Abraham's sake (v.23-24). This extended comparison of Isaac with Abraham is designed to tell us that even though Isaac appears to be making a mess of things (and what a mess in chapter 27!), God remains faithful for the sake of the promises he made to Abraham. His purposes will not be thwarted - Isaac is the son of the promise therefore God cannot turn away from him.

4. THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES (27:1-40)

After the Isaac/Abraham interlude we are prepared for the bizarre events of chapter 27. Once again, the action begins with Isaac's preference for game in the foreground (27:1-4 cf 25:28). This is his Achilles heel.

Rebekah's conniving (v.5ff), even though morally reprehensible, fits with Jacob being the son of the promise. He has the birthright, now he must get the patriarchal blessing which goes with it. Jacob acts in keeping with his name and cheats his Father and Esau in one fell swoop. Isaac unwittingly blesses the wrong son (v.28-29) and in doing so confirms the prophecy of 25:23 - he will be lord over his brother (cf. v.37).

There is no blessing for Esau - all he can hope for is that one day he will throw off the Jacob's yoke from his neck (v.40).

Once more, in these events shot through with pathos and deception, God's purposes are achieved.

5. JACOB IS THE ONE (27:41-28:9)

The end of this part of the story echoes the story of Isaac. Jacob is sent away to Laban, his grandfather, to find a wife who is not a Canaanite (cf. chapter 24). Esau does the opposite and marries an Ishmaelite woman (28:8-9) as an act of defiance.

The point is clear - Jacob is now the son of promise. All that was promised to Isaac his Father will now be promised to him. He doesn't deserve it either by virtue of his birth (he is the second son) or by virtue of his actions (he has cheated and deceived his brother and his Father neither of whom emerges with any credit). Yet, in the purposes of God, Jacob is the one chosen to be the son of the promise. All is sovereign grace.

CONNECTING WITH THE NT

1. **Romans 9:1-18** uses this story to explain God's purposes in electing mercy. It explains why not all ethnic Israel are believers in Jesus and it explains why many Gentiles are. God's purposes have not failed. God has mercy on whom he chooses to have mercy.
2. **Hebrews 11:20** is difficult! Everything in the Genesis narrative seems to Isaac's deception and weakness for game yet this verse tells us he acts in faith! Maybe we are to take the bigger picture and see that Isaac, deceived though he was, nonetheless by faith invoked blessings on the son of the promise. He truly believed that God would bless this son.

THINKING IT THROUGH

- In what ways do we struggle with the reality of God's electing mercy?
 - How does this passage in Genesis teach us to be thankful for it?
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Study Notes on Genesis

- How does it encourage us in our evangelism and discipleship?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 28:10-30:43

AIM

- To see that God's gracious purposes cannot be stopped even by the complexity of human relationships.

CONTEXT

We are now deep within the section of Genesis given over to, '...the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son' (25:19ff). The section so far has been dominated by God's prophecy that Esau will serve Jacob (25:23). This marks a complete inversion of the usual way within the culture of the patriarchs - the eldest son is usually the one who inherits the main part of his father's goods.

However, this inversion is fraught with theological significance too. Isaac is the son of the promise. Hence we'd anticipate his eldest son would inherit this status. But, God plans otherwise. The promise is all of grace hence by placing Jacob over Esau God emphasises this principle. His election is all of mercy (cf. Rom 9:1-13).

The outworking of the principle of election is anything but smooth. We are not presented with a cast of puppets dancing to the divine tune. Rather we are given an account of human weakness and deviousness. Almost none of the main players come out with any credit yet God's purpose stands and Jacob becomes the son of the promise as he receives both the birthright and the blessing.

The section we move into now focuses on Jacob and his offspring.

STRUCTURE

28:10-22 Stairway to Heaven

29:1-30 Back to Earth with a Bump

29:31-30:24 Patriarchal Family Planning

30:25-43 Animal Magic

1. STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN (28:10-22)

Jacob leaves Beersheba and heads towards Haran. This is significant since Haran is where God first called Abraham (11:31- 12:1). Hence, it is no surprise to hear God rehearse in verses 13-15 the same promises he made to Abraham.

In the dream Jacob is given access into heaven itself and recognises that this is the case in his waking state in verses 16-17. He anoints the stone he slept on as a sign of all that has happened in the place. He goes on to make a vow of allegiance to God in v.20-22. I think we should read the vow in a positive light rather than see it as Jacob doing a deal with God. Vows are not frowned on in the Old Testament (e.g. Exodus 30:1-2) and even have their place in the New Testament (Acts 18:18). Therefore, we should regard this episode as an important part of Jacob's conversion. God can change cheats!

2.BACK TO EARTH WITH A BUMP (29:1-30)

The narrative continues with the story of Jacob finding a wife. There are similarities with the story of Isaac finding a wife (e.g. wells and flocks and Laban) which establish once more that this is the son of the promise. However the marked difference is that there are virtually no references to God (cf. the multiplicity of references to God's providence in chapter 24).

I don't think this necessarily means that God is somehow not involved in the process. Clearly he is sovereign and is working out his will through it. However, the process is altogether more complex and the actions of Laban more devious. The narrator chooses to emphasise this aspect in contrast to chapter 24. It

Study Notes on Genesis

serves to establish the unstoppable purposes of God in the face of human weakness.

Nonetheless there is a supreme irony at work in this chapter. Jacob has been the twister par excellence so far in the account. He has cheated his brother out of his birthright and blessing. He has deceived his elderly father. Now, he meets his nemesis and is cheated by Laban (29:33-35). Laban's reasoning is based on the principle of the firstborn (v.26) which Jacob has worked to overturn in another context (25:29-34).

However, Jacob reacts to Laban's duplicity with patience and faithfulness. He put in another seven years work in order to earn the hand of Rachel his first love (29:30). But, the net effect of Laban's act is to sow discord between Jacob and his wives - Jacob loves Rachel more than he loves Leah. This will become significant in the purposes of God.

3. PATRIARCHAL FAMILY PLANNING (29:31-30:24)

It's worth schematising who bears who in this chapter!

1. **Leah:** Reuben (v.32), Simeon (v.33), Levi (v.34), Judah (v.35), Issachar (v.18), Zebulun (v.19) plus a daughter Dinah (v.21)
2. **Bilhah,** Rachel's servant: Dan (v.6), Naphtali (v.8)
3. **Zilpah,** Leah's servant: Gad (v.11), Asher (v.13)
4. **Rachel:** Joseph (v.24)

The section is a catalogue of intra-family jealousies and plotting. However, throughout God is seen to be at work:

- God opens Leah's womb (v.31)
- God provides each of Leah's further sons in v.31-35
- God is seen as the source of all children (30:2) and Rachel acknowledges this (v.6)
- God listens to Leah again (v.17)
- God remembers Rachel and listens to her and takes away her reproach (v.22-24)

All the time the point is being made that it is God who opens and shuts the wombs of the patriarchal wives. This has been a consistent theme in Genesis both in the life of Sarah and Rebekah (cf. 11:30, 15:2-5, 16:1-6, 17:16, 18:10, 21:2, 25:21). God is sovereign even through the scheming of these men and women.

Noticeably, the one who will emerge as the son of the promise - Judah (cf. Matt 1:2) - is born to Leah, the wife who is hated and not loved (29:31). Once more God makes the point that his grace overturns all human conventions. He chooses who he chooses and he loves who he loves.

4. ANIMAL MAGIC (30:25-43)

The section ends with a strange tale of sheep breeding. Jacob points out that he has been a source of blessing to Laban (30:30) and asks for some recompense now that he is a family man (v.31-32). Laban and Jacob then engage in a tortuous game of cross and double cross (v.35-43).

The ritual Jacob uses with the sticks of trees is probably based on ancient magic rites. God chooses to work even though these for the sake of the promise. Jacob ends up even richer than he was before and Laban is duped (v.42-43). God is sovereign as we will see even more clearly in chapter 31 when the scam works itself out.

CONNECTING WITH THE NT

1. **John 1:51** Jesus tells Nathanael (surely it is an irony at Jacob's expense when Jesus says that he is an 'Israelite in whom there is no deceit!') that he is Jacob's ladder! Jesus is the one who connects heaven to earth, Jesus is the one through whom all the promises to the patriarchs come to fulfilment.
 2. **1 Cor 1:25-31** The principle that God chooses the foolish and the despised (cf. Gen 29:31) is
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Study Notes on Genesis

embedded in the Gospel. God humbles us through it and gives us no reason to boast.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. How does the story of the Jacob so far teach us about the need for a true ladder between heaven and earth?
2. How does the story of the twists and turns of the Jacob and his family encourage us?
3. How does this story change the way we view our sin and God's purposes?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 31:1-33:20

AIM

- To see God graciously reconciling Jacob to himself and Jacob to Laban and Esau.

CONTEXT

Jacob has moved centre stage in the Genesis narrative. He has gained both his elder brother's birthright and blessing contrary to the established pattern where the eldest inherits these privileges. This has been in accordance with God's prophecy that the older shall serve the younger (25:23). But, these events also demonstrate that the promise is all of grace - human effort and status count for nothing. The account of Jacob and Esau exemplifies the principle of God's electing mercy (cf. Rom 9:1-13).

On a broader canvas we've also seen Abraham's children failing to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice (cf. 18:19). Jacob has lived up to his name as a 'twister' and Esau, Isaac and Rebekah have similarly not covered themselves in moral glory. Once more we're being shown the need for God's grace in their lives. God sticks with them despite their moral failure and even through their moral failure. God will establish yet a righteous and just rule in his world but we're not sure how.

The recent context is Jacob labouring for Laban in order to gain Rachel. God blesses him with offspring (according to the promise) albeit via circuitous routes (chapter 29-30). The last scene we witnessed was Jacob making sure he got the best of Laban's flocks in 30:25-43 and ending up a prosperous man. By the end of chapter 33 God will have reconciled Jacob to himself and to Esau and Laban.

STRUCTURE

- 31:1-55 God Reconciles Laban to Jacob
- 32:1-21 God Reconciles Jacob to Himself Part I
- 32:22-32 God Reconciles Jacob to Himself Part II
- 33:1-20 God Reconciles Esau to Jacob

1. GOD RECONCILES LABAN TO JACOB (31:1-55)

Chapter 30 has ended with Jacob apparently making himself prosperous at his father-in-law's expense (30:41-43). The drama unfolds in chapter 31 with tension and uncertainty which is not resolved until the very end. However, God is moved back to the centre of the action and his actions are made explicit. There are a number of scenes in this section which are all dominated by God:

- 1-16** God speaks to Jacob and calls him to return to the land of his fathers (v.3). Jacob persuades his wives that this is the right course of action in v.4-13 and interprets the events which have led to his prosperity as the work of God. The women see that their father has effectively disowned them through his actions and encourage Jacob to follow God (v.16). So, Jacob and his wives are seen to be acting in accordance with God's will and call.
- 17-24** These verses recount the flight from Laban. There is one final irony as Jacob pulls one more trick in v.20. Laban pursues Jacob but once more God intervenes and effectively tells Laban to leave Jacob alone (v.24). God is acting for Jacob.
- 25-42** Laban and Jacob confront one another with Laban accusing Jacob of tricking him and stealing his goods and family. Laban recognises that it is only because Jacob's God has appeared to him that he doesn't harm him.

The incident with the household gods is probably designed to show the superiority of Jacob's God - they are incapable of helping Laban (in the way God has helped Jacob). The point is graphically and ironically made in the narrative as Rachel claims to be menstruating on them (v.33-35).

For his part Jacob accuses Laban of exploiting him when he has done no wrong (v.36-41).

Study Notes on Genesis

However, he is clear once more that it is God who has preserved him and rebuked Laban (v.42)

- iv. **43-55** Jacob and Laban establish a covenant between them. The covenant establishes peace between them but in the name of the God of Abraham (v.53). Jacob offers a sacrifice in v.54 as a way of sealing the covenant. The principle of cutting covenants via blood is once more established (cf. Gen 15)

So, in summary, this section shows us God at work in Jacob's life, preserving him from the potential future attacks of his father-in-law.

2.GOD RECONCILES JACOB TO HIMSELF PART I (32:1-21)

God's part in all that is about to unfold is signalled at the start of chapter 32 by the appearance of the angels (v.1-2). This is God's camp! Jacob is fearful of meeting his brother. He is right to be fearful given the words of 27:41.

However, it is noticeable that Jacob turns to God in prayer in v.9-12. He reminds God that it is Him who has called him to go back to his Father's land (v.9) and also that God has promised to make his offspring plentiful (v.12). He does this in an attitude of humility which recognises that he is totally dependent on God for deliverance (v.10-11). Only then does he take measures to placate Esau (v.13-21). Jacob seems to be moving away from trickery as an answer to all life's problems towards a trust in God.

3.GOD RECONCILES JACOB TO HIMSELF PART II (32:22-32)

This process is brought to a climax in verses 22-32. This is an extraordinary scene. Jacob wrestles with a man (v.24) who it becomes clear is divine (v.28, v.30). There is irony here too - in the past Jacob has employed deceit in order to gain the blessing of his father whereas here he persists in wrestling in order to get the blessing of God (v.26). God does bless him but changes him too. He marks the transformation via a name change (v.28) and a physical mark (v.25).

Jacob does see God face to face - this is a physical manifestation of God, most probably of the second person of the trinity. Hence there is no contradiction with God's statement to Moses's in Exodus 33:20.

4.GOD RECONCILES ESAU TO JACOB (33:1-20)

The end of the sequence of events comes in chapter 33 with this final scene of reconciliation between Jacob and Esau. Once more Jacob is quick to attribute his prosperity to the grace of God (v.5, 11).

Verse 10 must allude in some way to 32:30. Perhaps, in some way Jacob sees Esau's conciliatory, gracious attitude as mirroring God's conciliatory, gracious attitude to him at Peniel.

Jacob finds favour in Esau's eyes (v.8, 10, 15), the brothers are reconciled but Jacob marks the work of God by erecting an altar in v.20. Its name, meaning 'God, the God of Israel', is a summary of all that has happened to him. Whether dealing with Laban or Esau, God has proved to be his God. He is the favoured son of the promise.

CONNECTING WITH THE NT

1. At the heart of this narrative is the appearance of God to Jacob as a man who changes him and blesses him. This must foreshadow the incarnation of the second person of the trinity in Jesus Christ. Here we see, '... the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Cor 4:6).
2. In Christ we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph 1:3).
3. Through our encounter with Jesus Christ we are reconciled to God and humanity as Jacob was reconciled to Esau (2 Cor 18-21).

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. How does our encounter with God through Jesus Christ change the way we relate to other people?
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Study Notes on Genesis

2. Think of someone you have fallen out with. How does the gospel force you to seek reconciliation? When and how can you be reconciled to them?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 34:1-36:43

AIM

- To know that God's gracious covenant purposes are wide enough to sweep up all kinds of people.

CONTEXT

The big story of Genesis continues to unfold. God has made and blessed a good world. Adam and Eve failed to keep covenant and find themselves, along with the rest of creation, under God's curse. However, God commits himself to return his creation to a state of blessing as he establishes covenants with first Noah (and the whole created order Genesis 9:12-17) and then Abraham (Genesis 12-17). God's intention is that Abraham's children and household will keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice (18:19). Abraham and his family sometimes do keep the way of the Lord but often don't. How will God keep his promises to them?

We are now deep in the story of Jacob. His life has been shaped by the prophecy of ascendancy given about him by God in 25:23. We have seen him grasp his brother's birthright and blessing (25-27). We have also seen Esau, his brother, go his own way, away from God (28:6-9). Jacob and Esau both struggle to do the way of the Lord.

On the whole Jacob has prospered. He has many sons (29-30) and is reconciled both to his uncle Laban (31) and his brother Esau (33). Moreover, Jacob has a number of climactic encounters with God - at Bethel (28:10-22) and Peniel (32:22-32).

STRUCTURE

34:1-31 Rape

35:1-15 Repentance

35:16-29 Death

36:1-43 Grace

1. RAPE (34:1-31)

The rape of Dinah is a shameful episode for all concerned. God is noticeably not mentioned which is often an indicator of sinful actions. Let's look at the main characters:

- Dinah.** The opening verse suggest a lack of wisdom on Dinah's part. She goes out to see the women of the land. She is probably only about 15 and God's chosen people are meant to keep their distance from the Canaanites. This is no way excuses what happens to her and is probably intended as a comment on Jacob's failure to protect her.
- Jacob.** He is remarkably passive throughout the account. He hears of Dinah's defilement and yet it is his sons who act. He does nothing until v.30 and even then it is only to lament the trouble they have brought upon him.
- The Canaanite men.** Shechem rapes Dinah (which is seen in a broader light than just physical violation when it is referred to as defilement v.5). He never repents of this even though he is said to love her (v.3). Hamor is complicit in Shechem's desire to get Dinah for himself. The rest of the men of the town's willingness to get circumcised merely to turn a profit also serves as a judgement upon them. God's covenant sign (and by implication God's covenant) has been treated lightly.
- Simeon and Levi.** These two are right to be outraged (v.7, 31) but their actions in slaughtering the men of the city are more to do with vengeance than justice. Jacob assesses them as violent men in 49:5-7 and tells them they will be divided and scattered within Israel. Their actions here also serve to remove the right of primogeniture from them. God is clearing the way for Judah. Only Reuben stands between him and the right of inheritance now.

Study Notes on Genesis

2. REPENTANCE (35:1-15)

For all Jacob's lack of leadership and passivity in chapter 34, God has not finished with him. He is still the son of the promise. So, despite the terrible events of chapter 34, it comes as no surprise to hear God speaking to Jacob again at the start of chapter 35.

God sends Jacob back to Bethel where he'd first appeared to him and Jacob had vowed to make God his God if he kept him and prospered him. This point is not lost on Jacob so he tells his household to put away their foreign gods and to purify themselves. Dinah's defilement seems to be symbolic of a deeper defilement of the people of God among the Canaanites.

The journey back to Bethel is marked by irony - in chapter 34 Jacob was terrified by the prospect of what the Canaanites might do to him (34:30) whereas now the Canaanites are struck by the terror of the Lord (35:5). God is faithful to his promise to keep Jacob wherever he goes (28:15).

Jacob's return to Bethel is full of meaning. It marks a spiritual renewal for him after the disaster of Shechem. God renames him (note that throughout chapter 34 he has been called Jacob despite the name change in 32:28 - this reaffirmation of his new name can be viewed as a sign of God's commitment to him) and reaffirms the Abrahamic promises to him in 35:11-12.

Why the mention of Deborah (35:8)? The author might be passing judgement on Rebekah. She is noticeable among the wives of the patriarchs for not getting a death notice. The author might be drawing our attention to this omission by mentioning the death of her nurse instead. Rebekah's last words in the account were a promise to send for Jacob (27:45) which she never did. Her final words reflect her duplicity throughout the lives of her sons.

3. DEATH (35:16-29)

This section serves a number of functions:

- i. It records the death of Rachel (v.19) and Isaac (v.29). We are being prepared for the next generation to move centre stage.
- ii. It gives us the account of the completion of the twelve sons via the birth of Benjamin and hence the twelve tribes (v.18, 22b-26).
- iii. It tells us about Reuben's affair with Bilhah which in turn rules him out of the succession even though he is the firstborn (cf. 49:3-4). The way is now made clear for Judah to become the son of promise since Simeon and Levi have already been ruled out.

4. GRACE (36:1-43)

The extensive genealogy of Esau also serves a number of functions:

- i. It simultaneously describes Esau's blessing (he is still in the physical line of Abraham and therefore is blessed with many offspring) and the fact that he is not the son of promise. He takes his wives from among the Canaanites (36:2) and leaves the land of promise for the hill country of Seir or Edom (v.7-8). In this he echoes Lot's decision when he leaves Abraham (13:1-ff).
- ii. There is a focus on the chiefs and kings who appear in Esau's line (v.15ff, 29, 31, 40). Again, this appears to show how great Israel must become if God's prediction in 25:23 is to come to pass. Esau is great, how much greater will Israel be.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

God's grace continues to be seen in his dealings with family of the patriarchs. God's covenant is so wide that eventually it embraces not only the physical offspring of Israel but also the offspring of Esau (Edom - Deut 23:7, Amos 9:11-12). The New Testament interprets these passages about the inclusion of Edom as being about the inclusion of the Gentiles (Acts 15:12-18). So, God's grace wins - Israel and Edom are swept up by Christ!

Study Notes on Genesis

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. In what ways do we narrow the grace of God?
2. How does this narrative encourage us to keep God's grace wide?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 37:1-39:23

AIM

- To see God's gracious, sovereign providence at work in Jacob's family.

CONTEXT

We have reached a major transition point in Genesis. Isaac has died (35:29) and the attention of the narrator falls immediately on the first of his sons, Esau. Esau is not the son of the promise but nonetheless enjoys the blessings of the covenant. He has many offspring, many of whom are chiefs and kings (36:1-43). This serves to emphasise God's grace and faithfulness in keeping the covenant promises he made to Abraham. Ultimately, even the offspring of Esau will be included among the people of God (Acts 15:12-18).

However, after chapter 36 the focus of Genesis is firmly on the offspring of the other son of Isaac, Jacob. The opening of chapter 37 places him in the land of Canaan, the land of the promise and then goes on to mark the beginning of a new section with the characteristic, "These are the generations of Jacob".

The narrative is even more specific than that. It will be largely concerned with the fortunes of Jacob's family revolving around his sons Joseph and Judah. These are the central characters through whom God will work out his sovereign purposes, often in surprising ways. We will see a familiar pattern of God achieving his intentions through weak sinful human beings.

STRUCTURE

37:1-36 Slavery

38:1-30 Sex I

39:1-23 Sex II

1. SLAVERY (37:1-36)

The chapter falls naturally into two:

- 1-11** We are introduced to Joseph in these verses and are given a less than favourable initial impression. He tells tales on his brothers (v.2), is obviously his father's favourite son (v.3) and tells his brothers his dreams of dominance in tactless ways (v.5-11). The net effect is one of familial discord - Joseph's brothers hate him and cannot speak peacefully to him (v.4); they hate him for his dreams and for his words (v.8); they are jealous of him (v.11).

Nonetheless his dreams are prophetic. In the purposes of God, Jacob and his sons will bow down before Joseph later in the story. For now we are being set up for a major conflict.

- 12-36** The conflict comes to a head in these verses. The brothers plot to kill Joseph because of his dreams (18-20). Reuben intercedes on his behalf albeit in a less than self-sacrificial way (cf. v.29-30). Judah emerges as a calculating pragmatist - he sees there is nothing to be gained by killing Joseph (v.26) so does a deal and hatches a plot (v.26-28). He is quite happy to deceive his father (v.31-36).

There are echoes of Jacob's deception of Isaac here including the use of a goat to perform the final deception (cf.27:16ff).

Therefore, no one emerges with any honour in the story. Favouritism, insensitivity and sibling jealousy lead to deception and slavery. It's from these unlikely circumstances that God will fashion his purposes. God wants Joseph in Egypt and will get him there by extraordinary means

2. SEX I (38:1-30)

Chapter 38 pursues Judah as he goes 'off the tracks'. Again there are two natural parts to the narrative:

Study Notes on Genesis

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- i. **1-11** If Jacob's family relationships were complex then Judah's are all the more complex. He begins by keeping the wrong company (Hirah v.1) and eventually marries a Canaanite woman (v.2). Intermarriage in Genesis has so far been a mark of those who are not of the line of promise (cf. 24:2-4, 25:12-18, 28:6-9). We are not even told the name of his wife (v.2). So, all does not look promising for Judah.

Judah has three sons by Shua's daughter - Er is wicked in the sight of the Lord and we summarily told that the 'the Lord put him to death' (v.7). His brother Onan fails to act selflessly and refuses to produce offspring from his brothers line (v.8-9). He too is put to death by the Lord (v.10). Hence, Judah tries to safeguard Tamar until Shelah is old enough to produce offspring for the eldest brother. Throughout this sorry state of affairs Judah remains a silent figure neither endorsing or opposing his sons behaviour. He is presented in a negative light failing to do righteousness and justice and to walk in the way of the Lord (cf. 18:19).

- ii. **12-30** These verses record an elaborate deception by Tamar in order to gain offspring. She poses as a prostitute in order to force Judah to make her pregnant. Surprisingly to our ears, when the deception is revealed, Judah acknowledges that she has acted more righteously than he (v.26). Tamar holds to Gen 18:19!

Once more twins appear and in a deliberate echo of 25:23-26, the latter brother is first. God is reversing the natural order of things through the unwitting liaison of Judah with a Canaanite woman!

Once more God's sovereign, gracious providence is relentless. Judah looks to be a complete failure and a total covenant breaker yet God will make him head of Jacob's family.

3.SEX II (39:1-23)

The focus of the narrative swings back to Joseph, now in Egypt (v.1). The main emphasis of the chapter is that the Lord is with Joseph (v.2, 3, 21, 23). Moreover, those who are good to Joseph are blessed by God (v.5).

Joseph for his part emerges as a man of faith and trustworthiness. He is given responsibility both in Potiphar's house and the prison. He refuses the advances of Potiphar's wife (v.6-20) even though it takes him to prison. The writer of Genesis is deliberately paralleling Joseph's sexual restraint with Judah's lack of restraint. God is 'absent' in chapter 38 but almost 'omnipresent' in chapter 39. The writer is shouting at us - 'look what God is doing!'

God has begun to redeem Joseph from being a precocious teenager into a faithful young man. It is through Joseph that God will save Jacob's family and make the way clear for Judah to assume the leadership of the family. His sovereign overruling of Joseph's position in Egypt will create a new nation by the end of Genesis.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. Tamar is one of four women, all 'foreigners' and all with a hint of sexual scandal associated with them who appear in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 1:3 - the others are Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba). Tamar acts in righteous faith to secure the 'seed' - salvation by grace!
2. Joseph begins to prefigure the work of Jesus as he goes down to Egypt, as a righteous one, ultimately on behalf of the salvation of others (cf. Matt 2:13-15). The prefiguring will become more pronounced as the Genesis narrative proceeds.
3. God's sovereign providence is at work not only in Joseph's life but also in the lives of all believers (Rom 8:28).

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. How can we recognise God's sovereignty even in difficult, even evil, circumstances?
2. Why do we so easily slip into thinking salvation is by works not grace? How can we stop doing that?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 40:1-41:57

AIM

- To see that God perfects faith through testing.
- To see that God sovereignly orders his world for the sake of his glory.

CONTEXT

We are deep within the narrative of the 'generations of Jacob' (37:2). Chapter 37 has introduced us to a profoundly dysfunctional family. Jacob unwisely favours Joseph above all his brothers (37:3), Joseph tactlessly tells his brothers his dreams of dominance over his them (37:5-9) and the brothers in their turn attack Joseph, sell him into slavery and tell their father that he is dead (37:18-36).

Chapters 38-39 compare and contrast Judah and Joseph. Judah proves to be foolish - he marries a Canaanite woman and his lack of covenant faithfulness is exposed by the faithfulness of Tamar his daughter-in-law (38:1-26). Judah acknowledges that Tamar is more righteous than he is (38:26). Twins are born to Tamar and Judah one of whom will become significant in the history of redemption (cf. Matt 1:3 Perez).

Meanwhile, Joseph has found himself a slave in Egypt (39:1). However, the narrator is at pains to tell us that God is with him (v.2, 3, 21, 23). Even though Joseph finds himself in prison by the end of the chapter, we anticipate that God will work it for Joseph's good. He knows God's blessing in prison (v.23). Therefore, at the end of chapter 39 we are left wondering how God will fulfil the dream that Joseph's brothers will bow down to him (37:5ff) and how God will keep his promises to Abraham's descendants. Chapters 40-41 begin to answer both questions.

STRUCTURE

40:1-23 From the Prison...

41:1-57 ...To the Palace

1. FROM THE PRISON... (40:1-23)

Chapter 40 is an essential stage not only in Joseph's restoration in Egypt but also in his exaltation within Egypt. The chapter ends on a downbeat note (v.23) which only serves to heighten the tension - how will God deliver Joseph?

The key verse that controls the perspective of this chapter and the next is verse 8. Joseph tells his fellow prisoners, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" This will become all the more evident in chapter 41. In both chapters there is a human inability to interpret the dreams which only God can do (v.8 cf. 41:8). However, here it indicates to the reader that Joseph is trusting God and that God is working a way out for Joseph.

The content of the dreams in chapter 40 is not significant in the way that the content of the dreams will be significant in chapter 41. Here they seem to serve as a foil to make sure Joseph's God-given powers of interpretation are revealed. What Joseph says will happen, happens (v.12-22). The chief cupbearer (despite his initial forgetfulness) will be crucial in getting Joseph into the royal court.

The overall function of chapter 40 seems to be to establish Joseph as a reliable interpreter of dreams. It explains how Joseph can move from a position of humiliation to a position of exaltation. Hence, it's a bridge from the prison into the palace.

2. ... TO THE PALACE (41:1-57)

This chapter can be broken down into four scenes (see Waltke):

i. Scene 1: 1-8 The Pharaoh's Dream and Dilemma

Study Notes on Genesis

These verses introduce us to the events on which the chapter turns. The Pharaoh has two dreams and all the magicians and wise men of Egypt cannot interpret them for him (v.8). The narrator wants to show us the inability of the pagan gods and wise men to really discern reality. The hero of the story as it unfolds will be Joseph's God as he demonstrates his superiority over all other pretend gods.

The content of the dreams in this case is significant. Their fulfilment will not only demonstrate something about Joseph and Joseph's God but will also provide the occasion for a type of universal salvation. But that's to jump ahead!

ii. **Scene 2: 9-24 Joseph's Deliverance and Pharaoh's Retelling.**

The cupbearer remembers Joseph in v.9 - the word for 'offences' indicates he recognises he has sinned by not remembering Joseph before. Nonetheless, God's timing is perfect as will become clear. Much is made of the fact that Joseph interprets dreams correctly (v.12-13).

Joseph is summoned and the Pharaoh retells his dreams. But again the crucial verse is v.16. Joseph confidently tells Pharaoh that it is his God who interprets dreams not him. The deep actions of God in the story are again being emphasised.

The dreams are repeated for the sake of emphasis. Their fulfilment will have significance for the whole world.

iii. **Scene 3: 25-40 Joseph's Interpretation, Plan and Promotion.**

In verses 25-32 Joseph interprets the dreams, but interprets both of them and the events they refer to as the actions of God (v.25, 28). This idea reaches its climax in v.32 where Joseph refers to the 'doubling' as an indication that God will do these things. The number two has been almost omnipresent in the Joseph narrative (two dream in 37:5-9, twins in 38:27ff, 2 fellow prisoners with two dreams in chapter 40, two years gap in 41:1). All these point to God's sovereign hand being at work.

Joseph sticks his neck out in verses 33-36 and suggests a plan of action in the light of the dreams. This is an act of faith. He only has God's word that the years of plenty and famine will come to pass and yet he invites the Pharaoh to stake everything on their truth. Joseph proves himself to be the wise man unlike the wise men of Egypt who are not up to the job (v.8).

The Pharaoh recognises Joseph's 'Spirit-wisdom' (v.38). Joseph once more attributes everything to God (v.39) and is promoted (v.40).

iv. **Scene 4: 41-57 Joseph Rules**

Joseph's rise to power is meteoric. He goes from slavery to prison to prime minister. He marries into Egyptian nobility (v.45) and rules with wisdom, storing up food for the time of famine (v.46-49).

Again, two sons are born and significantly Joseph gives them Hebrew names recognising what God has done for him (v.50-52).

The chapter ends with the time of famine coming to pass as Joseph/God had said it would. Not only Egypt but 'all the earth' (v.57) are saved through actions of this one Israelite. The nations are blessed through the offspring of Abraham.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. Joseph is made perfect in faith through testing (chart the progression from a pit to a palace in chapters 37-41). This principle is at work in the life of Jesus (Hebrews 5:7-9) continues for new covenant believers (Hebrews 12:7ff, 1 Peter 5:6).
 2. God's purposes to bless the nations through Abraham are pre-figured in Joseph's international food aid programme and are brought to fulfilment through Christ in the new heavens and the new earth, a place of extraordinary fruitfulness (Isaiah 55:17-25, Rev. 22:1-5).
 3. God revealed his purposes through the dreams. He has given us a final and definitive revelation of his sovereign purpose in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4).
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Study Notes on Genesis

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. In what ways do we experience testing? How do we respond to it? How can we respond in faith like Joseph?
2. How big is our view of the blessing of the nations by Jesus? How do we restrict it? How concrete is it - what will Jesus actually do at the end of time to bless the nations?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 42:1-43:34

AIM

- To see God forming an embryonic nation as he begins to effect reconciliation within Jacob's family.

CONTEXT

It's worth revisiting the big picture at this point. God's intention for his world was that it should be filled with people made in his image ruling under his rule (Gen 1:28). Post-fall this remains his purpose (e.g. Gen 9:1) but it won't just 'happen'. God must sovereignly and graciously intervene to bring about redemption. He promises to do this via Abraham who will be the father of many offspring, kings and nations in a new land (Genesis 12). God's desire is that the children of Abraham will do righteousness and justice (18:19).

The Genesis narrative follows the twists and turns of Abraham's offspring, some faithful to the covenant promises, some not. This has been graphically expressed in the saga of Jacob and his family. Jacob has swung from deception (chs. 25-27) to faith (32:22-32). His family initially appears to be dysfunctional (chs. 37-38). However, as Joseph is separated from the family we've seen God at work elevating him from slavery and prison to prime minister of Egypt (chs. 39-41). God brings about a degree of universal blessing through Joseph to remind us that his promises to Abraham are still in force (41:57).

However, we are still left asking how God will make a great nation of Jacob and his sons. Will there ever be unity among them. The following chapters begin to answer that question as they close the family saga in 4 scenes. Chapters 42-43 contain the first two scenes.

STRUCTURE

42:1-38 The first Journey to Egypt

43:1-34 The Second Journey to Egypt

1. THE FIRST JOURNEY TO EGYPT (42:1-38)

It's been a long time since we've heard about Jacob and the rest of Joseph's brothers (cf. ch. 37). The world-wide famine (41:57) inevitably impacts them and brings them back into Joseph's orbit.

Chapter 42 opens with a hint that Joseph's brothers are feeling guilty - they knew the Midianite traders were on their way to Egypt and that therefore their brother would likely end up there. Hence, when the news comes through that there is grain in Egypt, all they can do is 'to look at one another' (42:1). This awkwardness and Jacob's command to head to Egypt to get food will prove to be the beginning of their redemption.

Interestingly, this scene begins with suggestions of death - v. 2 and v.38. The danger of physical death surely parallels the danger of spiritual death which faces Jacob and his family. Unless reconciliation is brought about then they will be spiritually bankrupt.

The scene gives us hope for the family in a variety of ways:

- i. When Joseph's brothers arrive in Egypt, they bow before him (v.6). We are immediately reminded of Joseph's dream in 37:5-11 (cf. 42:9). The dream is beginning to be fulfilled. Given that we have seen God work so powerfully through the fulfilment of dream in chapters 40-41, we have every reason to believe he is active here.
 - ii. Joseph tests his brothers' motivation and integrity (v.6ff). He has faced similar tests and has come through. Testing seems to be the way God purifies the patriarchal families and hence again there is a suggestion here that God is at work. This is confirmed when we see the first sign of repentance by the brothers as they admit their guilt in selling Joseph (v.21).
 - iii. Joseph, for his part, demonstrates a rare combination of toughness (v.7) and tenderness (v.24). The former might be interpreted as a desire for vengeance were it not for the latter. We begin to think that Joseph wants his brothers back once he can trust them.
-

Study Notes on Genesis

On the downside Jacob continues to show favouritism towards Benjamin and a lack of concern for Simeon (v.38). Reuben is well intentioned but weak as he offers the life of his two sons (v.38). This lack of willingness to self-sacrifice will contrast with Judah later in the narrative.

2. THE SECOND JOURNEY TO EGYPT (43:1-34)

This scene has two acts. The first is in Canaan as the family negotiates the return to Egypt (v.1-14). The key features of this scene are:

- i. Jacob's final capitulation to Benjamin being taken to Egypt (v.13). This will prove to be the proof Joseph needs of the goodwill of the family.
- ii. Judah emerges as the leader of the family (v.8-10). He respectfully but firmly takes his father on and forces his hand re Benjamin. Unlike Reuben, Judah is prepared to put himself on the line (v.9 cf. 42:37). He knows the urgency of the situation.
- iii. There is an explicit acknowledgement by Jacob that their future is dependent on the mercy of God (v.14). If God does not act in mercy then he must accept his bereavement. The hand of providence is slowly being exposed.

The second act is set in Egypt (v.15-34) as the brothers once more meet Joseph. Once Joseph sees Benjamin (v.16) he knows for sure that his brothers are sincere and his attitude changes from one of roughness where he treats them like strangers (cf. 42:7) to one of hospitality where he treats them as honoured guests.

Joseph's steward once more attributes what is going on to the God of your father (v.23) - peace or shalom is being brought about by him. This time the 11 brothers bow down to Joseph (v.26, 28) so that the dream might be fully fulfilled. Joseph in his turn blesses Benjamin (v.29) and is overcome with fraternal emotion (v.30).

The scene ends with a meal (v.31-34) - always a sign of acceptance and friendship within the ancient Near East. The brothers once more look at one another (cf. 42:1) but this time in amazement not guilt. The preferential treatment given to Benjamin, far from provoking jealousy as it did with Joseph (cf. 37:4), now leads to merriment (v.34).

However, whilst all the signs are good, there is still now final reconciliation. Joseph still conceals his identity and is served separately to his brothers (v.32). The scene ends with us asking how final reconciliation will come about. The last two scenes will answer that question for us.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. The principle of God forming a people through testing, which we began to see in the last study, is all the stronger here. Chapters 40-41 focussed the principle on an individual. Chapters 42-43 focus it on an embryonic nation. As the patriarchal family are unified and purified, so the church will be purified and unified by Jesus (Ephesians 5:25-27, 1 Peter 1:6-9).
2. God is keeping his promise to form mercifully a nation from Abraham. This nation will eventually become the church (1 Peter 2:9-10). It's proto-leader in Genesis 42-43 is Judah who will be the father of it's final leader Jesus Christ (Matt 1:2).

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. How is the church tested today in order to purify it and unify it? How do we naturally respond to these testings? How should we respond?
2. How corporate is our understanding of the Christian faith? In what ways do we prioritise the individual over the corporate? In what ways can we reverse that trend and see the 'holy nation' as the focus of God's concern?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 44:1-46:27

AIM

- To see God sovereignly bring about reconciliation in Jacob's family as he continues to fulfil his promise to bless Abraham's offspring.

CONTEXT

We left the saga of Joseph's reconciliation with his family only part finished at the end of chapter 43 of Genesis. Joseph's brothers had made two journeys to Egypt in search of food (the first two scenes in an act of four scenes). Each time Joseph has refused to reveal his identity to them.

Initially he has been slightly hostile towards them (42:7). However, by the end of the second journey Joseph and his brothers are feasting and drinking together - a sure sign that final reconciliation is not far away.

But, the big story in these chapters is God working behind the scenes to effect his purposes for Jacob's family. He is faithful to his promises to Abraham and will not allow this family to disintegrate. So, at significant points in the narrative God's sovereignty, mercy and grace is invoked (42:28, 43:14, 23, 29).

Nonetheless, from a dramatic point of view we were left on the edge of our seats at the end of chapter 43. Joseph so far has not revealed his identity. We're left asking when we he do so and to what end? How will God work out his purposes for the family of promise? Will there be blessing or curse? The next two scenes in this act will answer the questions for us as Judah and Joseph both emerge as heroes within the story.

STRUCTURE

44:1-45:15 The Reconciliation of A Family

45:16-46:27 The Formation of a Nation

1. THE RECONCILIATION OF A FAMILY (44:1-45:15)

This scene works itself out in three incidents:

i. 44:1-13 The Steward's Test of the Brothers

Joseph instructs his steward to set up his brothers. He deliberately targets Benjamin, the youngest, since he knows he is most precious to Jacob. In the past the brothers have shown little concern for Jacob or Benjamin but the tearing of clothes in verse 13 seems to indicate a change of heart.

ii. 44:14-34 Joseph's Test of Judah

This incident marks the inauguration of Judah as head of the family within the Genesis narrative. Verses 14-16 indicate repentant hearts - they throw themselves to the ground before Joseph indicating their desire for mercy. While they plead their innocence over the specific charge of theft, they appear to acknowledge their wider guilt which has now been uncovered by God (v.16).

Judah steps up and tries to persuade Joseph to relent in his desire to enslave Benjamin. His major concern is the effect it will have on his father Jacob (v.30-31). Remarkably Judah offers himself in place of Benjamin (v.33). He is prepared to be Joseph's slave, even though falsely accused for the sake of his brother and father. This stands in marked contrast to his attitude in chapter 37 where Judah is concerned only for his own gain.

Joseph for his part is happy to play the brothers along in this incident. His reference to the cup as a cup of divination is ironic - throughout the wider narrative Joseph has been dependent on God for revelation (cf. his interpretation of dreams). He knows who the brothers are without the aid of any outside pagan practices. His main concern is to test their integrity - have they really changed?

iii. 45:1-15 Joseph's Confession

Study Notes on Genesis

This incident is intensely moving. Joseph can no longer contain himself. He reveals his identity with loud weeping (v.2 cf. v.14-15), which communicates the enormous release of tension as the incident reaches its conclusion. He invites his terror-struck brothers to come close to him (v.4), promises them a permanent place in Egypt with the best of the land (v.10-12) and the incident concludes with the pregnant phrase, "afterwards his brothers talked with him" - a sign of renewed trust and communication.

But, the most striking thing about the incident is Joseph's recognition of God's sovereignty in the whole affair. He is able to be generous towards his brothers since, '...it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.' (v.5). Indeed, Joseph sees God's purposes as even more specific than that - it was, '...to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save lives by a great deliverance'. This is about preserving the line of Abraham in a time of famine.

Joseph summarises in a remarkable way in verse 8 - 'So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.'

2. THE FORMATION OF A NATION (45:16-46:27)

The brothers return to get their father and their families. Jacob takes some persuading but eventually is convinced that his son, Joseph, is alive.

The caravan sets out but pauses at Beersheba (46:1). Beersheba has been enormously significant in Genesis.

- Abraham swore an oath there with Abimelech, planted a tree there and called upon the name of the Lord, the Eternal God (21:31-33).
- Abraham sets off to Beersheba immediately after the pseudo-sacrifice of Isaac (22:19).
- God appears to Isaac at Beersheba to reassure him that the promises he had made to Abraham were still valid (26:23-25).

Therefore, it is significant that Jacob pauses there to offer sacrifices, 'to the God of his father Isaac' and that this God once more reaffirms the covenant promises he made to Abraham (v.3). Jacob will become a great nation even in Egypt away from the land of promise. God's purposes will not be thwarted.

The extended genealogy in verses 8-27 confirms this reality. Here is the beginning of a great nation as the extended family of Jacob is itemised. The genealogy ends in verse 27 by telling us that the number of Jacob's family who went to Egypt were seventy in all. The number may or may not be mathematically precise - that is not the concern of the author. Rather the author wants us to know that this a complete, perfect number. The remnant of 45:7 is complete and sufficient in God's purposes to bless his world once more. This same genealogy will reappear in Exodus 1:1-5 as the story of the nation of Israel continues.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. The formation of a people in Genesis reaches its conclusion in the new creation. Revelation 14:1-3 introduces us to the 144,000 redeemed from the earth. If possible this is an even more complete and perfect number (12x12) than the seventy of Genesis 46. God takes Joseph to Egypt on behalf of all his people.
2. Both Judah and Joseph point ahead to Jesus. Judah offers himself instead of another for the sake of his father. Joseph goes down to Egypt and is received back as one from the dead in order to rule a whole kingdom.
3. God continues to work out his sovereign purposes even when acts seem to be evil. Joseph's perspective on his brothers' actions is the perspective of the New Testament believer who knows the goodness of God's sovereignty (Rom 8:28).

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. How can we develop a dual perspective which allows us to recognise evil (e.g. Joseph's brothers selling for him as dead) and yet see God's hand at work?
 2. What are the dangers in this? What are the encouragements?
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Study Notes on Genesis

3. How do Judah and Joseph build our trust in Jesus?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 46:28-48:22

AIM

- To see that God preserves and blesses his people even when in 'exile' from the Promised Land.

CONTEXT

The story of Jacob and his family is moving towards its final scenes. The family has come a long way since Jacob first cheated his brother Esau out of his birthright and blessing. There is narrative irony in the section to which we're coming as Jacob's final act is to bless first Pharaoh and then his sons.

However, the family find themselves outside of the Promised Land, exiled in Egypt. There is a question mark over their survival. Or at least if not over their survival, over whether or not they will remain distinct as a covenant people. Will they prosper in Egypt but lose their distinctiveness. Or will they fall into poverty and go out of existence?

Clearly these questions have as much to do with God and his faithfulness as they do with Jacob and his family. At stake in Egypt is God's character. Has he brought these people so far to allow them to disappear? Or will he remember Abraham and keep them and prosper them?

This complex of questions finds its answer in these final chapters of Genesis. In fact, God has already prepared us for the answer back in Genesis 15 where even as he cuts a covenant with Abram he tells him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own..." Even as God makes the covenant he recognises that there will be exile.

STRUCTURE

46:28-47:12 Home from Home?

47:13-31 Far from Home

48:1-22 Heading Home

1. HOME FROM HOME? (46:28-47:12)

Jacob and Joseph are tearfully reunited (count how many times Joseph cries in Genesis - big patriarchs do cry!) v.29. Joseph hatches a plan to get good land for his family (v.31-34). Chapter 47 sees the plan being executed successfully.

However, of particular significance is the encounter between Jacob and Pharaoh in verses 7-10. The incident is topped and tailed by Jacob probably blessing Pharaoh i.e. wishing him life and health and prosperity (v.7, 10). Jacob acknowledges the few and difficult years he has lived. He has been shaped as a man in the crucible of life but now emerges as a dignified old man. Significantly he refers to his life as a pilgrimage - he is travelling towards another destination beyond Egypt. Egypt will not be his final resting-place, physically or spiritually.

Nonetheless for now Egypt appears to be a divinely provided place of security for Jacob and his family.

2. FAR FROM HOME (47:13-31)

This section presses home the increasing contrast between Jacob's family and the people of Egypt. The author is at pains to describe the spiralling scarcity of food in Egypt and the corresponding desperation of its people. The sequence of poverty is this:

- No money v.14
- No livestock v.17
- No land v.v.20

Study Notes on Genesis

- No freedom v.21

The key player in all of this is Joseph. He continues to act in the interests of the Pharaoh as he gathers up money, land, people and revenue (v.26) on his behalf. However, the people of Egypt regard him as a saviour rather than as an oppressor - if it were not for Joseph they would be dead. There is a supreme historical irony at work - Israel enslaves Egypt for her good, whereas Egypt will enslave Israel to her detriment.

Verse 27 makes the point - Israel prospers in terms of land and numbers. God is keeping his promise to Abraham and the other patriarchs to make them a great nation.

The temptation would be to grow comfortable. Surely if God is prospering us in Egypt then why worry about Canaan? Jacob shows his faithfulness to the covenant in verses 28-31. He makes Joseph swear that he will make sure that he will be buried in Egypt. He wants to be buried with his fathers (v.30). Jacob recognises, even in the middle of material prosperity, that he is far from home.

3. HEADING HOME (48:1-22)

Jacob is nearing the end of his life as illness creeps on him. So, he summons Joseph and his two 'Egyptian' sons, Ephraim and Muons (v.1). The significant points of the encounter between the old man, his son and grandsons are these

- i. Jacob rehearses the covenant promises with Joseph and then shockingly 'adopts' Ephraim and Manasseh as his children (v.1-6). They are graciously swept up into the covenant.
- ii. Jacob deliberately reverses the principle of primogeniture with Ephraim and Manasseh (v.v.19). This has been a recurring theme in Genesis (e.g. 25:23, 38:27-30). God's gracious sovereignty in election is asserted even at the end of Jacob's life.
- iii. Jacob assures Joseph that God will be with him and will take him back to Canaan (v.21). To secure the land and the promise Jacob gives Joseph the land he gained from the Amorites (cf. chapter 34).

So, as Jacob's life draws to a close he makes provision for his descendants in the land of promise. Land and progeny remain central even in Egypt. The final chapters will see Jacob blessing his sons and determining the future shape of the people who are coming into being in Egypt.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. Once more Joseph takes on a typical role - he anticipate Jesus as the rescuer of a great people.
2. God's people prosper in exile even while they anticipate their final home in Canaan. This seems to capture the NT tension between being 'aliens and strangers in the world' (1 Peter 2:11) and yet being committed to life in this world until Christ renews it.
3. Jacob exemplifies the life of faith. He worships even at the end of his life (Gen 47:31 cf. Heb 11:21). He looks to the future even as his life draws to an end. He knows he is on a pilgrimage.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. How do we experience a tension between living life now and yet anticipating a new creation?
2. What are the temptations?
3. How do Joseph and Jacob help us and encourage us to look to Christ?

Study Notes on Genesis

GENESIS 49:1-50:26

AIM

- To worship God for his faithfulness to his promise of a land and a people.

CONTEXT

These chapters mark the end of the Genesis narrative. They summarise effectively the saga of Jacob's family and the partial fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises. However, they also function to look forward to other climactic events in Israel's history - the Exodus, the Kingship, the Messiah. The chapters invite us, as we shall see, to take a big picture approach to all that has happened and will happen.

Furthermore, they mark the final redemption of Jacob. His beginnings in Genesis while set apart by the divine promise, were on the whole negative (chs. 25-27). However, we find him at the end of his life, prosperous with many children. He functions as a prophet and his blessing shapes the future history of Israel and the world. He receives the highest honours that Egypt can give in his death.

But, the real centre of these chapters is God. His promises to Abraham continue to dominate the action. At crucial points in them God is appealed to by the main human actors (e.g. 49:18, 50:20). His purposes are acknowledged as shaping the narrative which we have witnessed to this point. His purposes will dominate the history of Israel which is to come. Genesis leaves us worshipping God for his faithfulness but also asking, what will He do next? It invites us to look forward to Jesus Christ who will bring to final fulfilment the promises to Abraham and the blessing of Jacob on his sons.

STRUCTURE

49:1-28 The Blessings

49:29-50:26 The Burials

1. THE BLESSINGS (49:1-28)

The blessings are structured by wife and handmaid:

- Leah's 6 sons (v.3-15)
- Bilhah-Zilpah's 4 sons (v.16-21)
- Rachel's 2 sons (v.22-27)

Each group is presented by birth order of sons except for Issachar and Zebulun. There are a number of notable factors in the blessings:

- i. The narrator frames the blessings in such a way to say that Jacob's words are prophetic and are concerned not just with the 12 boys but also with the tribes who will come from them. Verse 1 points us to, 'in days to come' and v.29 explicitly connects the blessings with the 12 tribes. Jacob foretells the future history of the 12 tribes of Israel.
- ii. God stands at the heart of the blessings in verse 18. Jacob cries out to God for deliverance since his descriptions of his sons' futures will inevitably involve conflict (e.g. v.17). It is a recognition of divine sovereignty and an expression of faith by Jacob. Without God's help none of the blessings will happen.
- iii. A number of the blessings are 'anti-blessings' (to use Waltke's phrase). Reuben is sanctioned for his sexual misdemeanours (v.4 cf. 35:22) and the right of the first born is removed from him. Similarly, Simeon and Levi are sanctioned for their attack on the Hivites v.5-7 cf. 34:1-31).

However, in the bigger plan of God, these anti-blessing serve for the blessing of Israel as a whole. He removes the possibility of uncontrolled, brutal leadership from his people and makes way for Judah to assume the leadership of the nations. Nonetheless, God remains gracious - the

Study Notes on Genesis

descendants of Levi are given the task of serving God in the Temple.

- iv. The pre-eminence of Judah and Joseph is indicated by the disproportionate amount of verses given to them in the blessings.

Judah is given the leadership of the nation in v.8. He is a lion (v.9) who will rule the nation as a king (v.10). The difficult v.10b is accepted by most scholars as referring at least to the coming of King David and by many to the coming of the messiah. The descriptions in v.11-12 are descriptions of prosperity and luxury.

Joseph has blessing upon blessing from every possible source lavished on him (v.22-26). He alone has God deliberately invoked as his blesser (v.24-25). However, even though he is described as the prince among his brothers (v.26), the word for prince is never used of one who will be king. This right is reserved for Judah's royal descendants (cf. v.10). Joseph will be great but not as great as Judah will. The two brothers become the two dominant tribes in the north and south of Judah and Israel.

- v. The blessings on the remaining brothers accurately describe the role they will come to play in the future history of the nation. For example, Dan, although a small tribe will be deadly to its opponents (v.16-17 cf. Samson of the tribe of Dan's attack on the Philistines in Judges 14-16).

The blessings as a whole point us once again to God's fulfilment of the promise to Abraham. A great nation does come from him. They also point us to the grace of God. Jacob's bad beginnings end up for the good of the people.

2. THE BURIALS (49:29-50:26)

The burials of Jacob and Joseph once again show us the triumph of faith in a promise keeping God.

- Jacob requests that he be returned home to Canaan to be buried with his unloved wife Leah rather than with his loved wife Rachel (49:29-33). The land is important and he knows God will keep his promise to give it to his descendants. The extended account of his death, mourning and burial in 50:1-14 serves to show us how great and honoured Jacob was by the end of his life.
- The incident with the brothers in 50:15-21 serves to show that familial unity stretches beyond the death of Jacob. True reconciliation has been effected and the nation will continue (v.21). Joseph is quick to attribute their shared history to the sovereignty of God (v.20).
- Once more the narrator stresses the blessing of offspring in the final years of Joseph (v.22-23). Joseph's last recorded words are a prophecy of the Exodus (v.24-25) and a request that his bones will be taken with them when they leave. Again, he harks back to the Abrahamic covenant (15:13-14). The conclusion of the book with Joseph's body in Egypt leaves us wanting to know how God will deliver his people and Joseph's bones back to Canaan - it sets us up for the book of Exodus.

CONNECTING WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. Jacob's blessing of Judah is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Lion of Judah (Rev 5:5) and the great Son of David (Luke 1:32).
2. Both Jacob in his blessing and Joseph in his death exemplify the life of faith (Hebrews 11:21-22). Jacob looks ahead to see what will become of the nation and Joseph looks ahead to a great Exodus and life in a new land. Hebrews tells us that neither received what had been promised but God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect (Heb 11:39-40).
3. The deliverance that Jacob looks for ultimately arrives in Jesus Christ who delivers all his people. Jesus effects a great Exodus for his people in to the Promised Land of the new heavens and the new earth.

THINKING IT THROUGH

1. In what ways has Genesis renewed my appreciation of God's sovereign purposes in history?
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Study Notes on Genesis

2. How has it taught me more about Jesus Christ?
3. Take time to thank God and to meditate on his goodness and mercy and faithfulness to you in Jesus Christ.