

JANUARY 5

Genesis 11:1-13:4

There is a lot of information in this section, most of it flowing toward Abraham. God and Moses are not giving Israel a "history of the world," but to some degree, a history of their nation. I say "to some degree," because inherent in this history is the description to Israel of how this mess began, and how God is working with and through mankind to bring redemption. Israel will become God's messenger to the world that salvation and blessing are possible. Unfortunately, Israel will also become the symbol of mankind in rebellion to God. This "service" to humanity will cost them a lot, but there will be blessing at the end.

Genesis 11

Vs. 1-11 Whereas the problem in Genesis 6:1 may have involved man calling on "spirits" and those angels mixing with mankind in a way that produced almost absolute corruption, this initiative seems to come solely from man. Notice the term in v. 5 - *children of man*.

V. 4 It seems implied that the *tower* was for worship, possibly for worshipping or getting information from the stars. Ironically, this area is where the wise men eventually came from.

V. 6 That nothing would be impossible for man, I think, implies that mankind would have become as deeply corrupt as they were before the flood. God "nipped it in the bud."

Vs. 7-8 I have never understood that mankind had sinned in that they didn't scatter after the flood. How do you define *disperse*? The sin here was the tower and seeking to make themselves capable of finding answers without God. The giving of languages was brilliant on God's part. Interestingly today, English has become the common language of the world. Things are more connected today than ever before, and once again it seems we are capable of all sorts of things. What God did there held back this "unity and self-sufficiency" phenomenon for a long time.

Vs. 9-26 This is tracing the line of faith and of the promise of a child and deliverer. Almost all of these names appear in Jesus' genealogy in both Matthew and Luke.

Part of enjoying reading the OT is getting curious and making observations.

How many years were there between the end of the flood and Peleg and the end of the flood and Abe? Who is the last baby in the line of the promise that Noah would have bounced on his knee? You also have to look at yesterday's reading regarding Noah's age and how many years he lived after the flood. Have fun!

These years were a time of incredible change in history. Nimrod, thought to be the builder of Babel, and first "man of renown," was born right away. This would set the wheels in motion for the language confusion, the scattering of mankind and the grouping of languages, clans and tribes, and (in my opinion) the drifting of the continents in the days of Peleg, about ___ years after the flood.

These days would also have been the days of Job. The climate would have been changing; animals that needed the pre-flood greenhouse climate to live would have been going extinct. Also, the age of men was decreasing drastically, some think, due to the different atmospheric conditions after the flood (that being the natural agent of God's working to bring the age of man down to about 100).

V. 26 There is a little bit of a problem with this verse. If you look at Gen 12:4, Abe was 75 when he left Haran. That doesn't work if Abe was born when Terah was 70 and didn't leave Haran until after Terah had died (Acts 7:4). It is best to understand this verse saying that after Terah was 70, he had three sons in the years that followed. Probably, Abraham is named first because he is the most prominent of the three. Apparently Abraham was born when Terah was 130. The reason for the focus on these three sons is that they figure in the history to follow, but Abe is the focus of

the story. Abraham is not only the beginning of the nation of Israel, but with Abraham, the promise of redemption becomes more defined. Another promise is given.

A guy once asked me why God was a Jew. As you see the story to this point, there isn't a Jew around. But there is God who is seeking to use the godly lineage, from Adam through Noah to Abraham and beyond, to bring about redemption. As disciples we have to believe that since the Fall, God has been involved in the redemption of mankind fulltime. As you see Him working with the godly line of mankind, He is saving and working through those who have faith in Him and hope in His promise. As redemption is His purpose, and was to be the purpose of Israel and was the purpose of Christ, it is to be our purpose as His disciples.

An interesting take on all of this history and the selection of Abraham/Israel is given in the ESV and Septuagint reading of Deuteronomy 32:8, *When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the **sons of God*** (my emphasis)." The Septuagint (Greek version of the OT written before Christ and after the Babylonian exile) says "angels of God." These "sons" or angels would be referring to those bad princes mentioned in Daniel 10. The implication being, that as God allowed Satan and his angels to follow through with the authority He had given them to watch over mankind and the nations of men, God kept one man for Himself, making a nation from him to use as His voice of redemption to the other nations, and then, to all humanity.

Vs. 27-32 This introduces Abraham's (Abram's) family and background. Some of the names mentioned here will be important during the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

These verses are a summary. Apparently God called Abraham in Ur, a city on the Euphrates near the Persian Gulf. Terah accompanied Abraham toward Canaan and brought his family and stuff 600 miles north until they settled in a place they called Haran, which they named after his youngest son who had died in Ur. For some reason they stopped here. Some suggest that this was disobedience on Abe's part. More likely God had this planned. Haran would become an important place for Isaac and Jacob. It could be that the father, Terah, had a strong hold on Abraham. Who knows? But, according to Joshua 24:2, Terah was an idolater. Abraham was not. He was a fully devoted follower of God. God probably wanted Terah left behind. From here God spoke to Abraham again to separate himself from his family and go to Canaan.

Genesis 12

Vs. 1-3 According to Acts 7:2, God first called Abraham in Ur. Now in Haran, after the death of Terah, God renews the call and promise to Abraham.

The promise to Abraham is explained in the New Testament to be for the redemption of mankind. Jesus came from Abraham and fulfilled this promise; that is, in Jesus, the descendant of Abraham, all nations will be blessed. This promise is a monument in redemptive history.

The faith of Abraham is amazing. It is not only a lesson and model for us all (Romans 4), but it serves as a basis of understanding that even in the OT, before and after the giving of the law, salvation was based on faith. It could be that Abe just "had" this faith, but I think he was influenced by Noah. Depending on how you understand the dating, Abe would have either been 60 when Noah died or Abe would have been born two years after Noah's death. In any case Shem, the son of faith who believed the promise, lived for 500 years after the flood and died just 25 years before Abraham died. For Abraham, the story of redemption wouldn't have been some old story handed down from generation to generation. Abe knew of Noah and he might have personally known Shem. If so, I'll bet God touched his heart with the need for salvation and redemption.

Vs. 4-9 This account shows Abraham's entrance into Canaan.

V. 4 Apparently Abraham felt responsible for Lot, his brother Haran's son. Note that Abe was 75 when he left Haran.

V. 5 When they left, Abe already had servants born into his household. When they traveled, it must have looked like a mass of people, wagons and great flocks. When they set up, they probably looked like a tent city. This was no small endeavor.

V. 7 Shechem would become a fairly well-known place. God confirmed His calling and promise to Abraham.

As the people of Israel heard this story as Moses wrote it and read it to them, they would be instructed in the faith and failings of Abraham and God's faithfulness to His promises.

Vs. 10-20 Now we come to something Abe did wrong. It was something that was to instruct Israel. As disciples, we are meant to learn from this as well.

Once given the promise, Abraham still panicked when the famine came. With the firmness and nature of the promise God had made to him, Abe should have known that God would protect him in all situations, and so, to seek God and rest in Him. That's easy to write, right? Going to Egypt, per se, wasn't wrong, but we have no evidence that he asked God about going to Egypt. I definitely don't think God helped him come up with the half lie regarding Sarah.

God saved Abe from the Egyptians, but He didn't save him from the consequences.

Genesis 13:1-4

What Abe gained in Egypt became a thorn in his side. His "ill gotten" wealth became a division between him and Lot. And then, they acquired Hagar, and she became a division between Abe and Sarah.

Even as disciples, "using our heads" and just doing what seems obvious can cause major problems or destroy the work that God is doing through us. We have to seek God and His way, even if we think the way before us seems obvious. We are no better than Abraham, and this story is here for us, *on whom the end of the ages has come.* ¹²*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands, take heed lest he fall.* (1 Cor. 10:11-12)

We have seen a man like Noah who became an object of ridicule for his neighbors for 100 years as he built the ark. It was all because he followed God. Now we see Abraham and Sarah following God. They gave up everything they had in Ur and in Haran to live in tents for the rest of their lives. The nature of knowing the Lord is to follow. But it is the passion of every disciple to follow his Lord in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples.

Matthew 5:1-26

Although Matthew is being somewhat chronological here, his focus now, having established that Jesus is the Messiah and King of Israel, is to give a demonstration of His teaching. Matthew shows Jesus' authority over the law and how the people should live.

Let me put the sermon and the timeframe when Jesus said this in perspective. At this point, John, chapters 2-5 are finished. Jesus has been in public ministry for over a year. If you read Luke 6:1-19, you'll see what happened just before the sermon. The leaders now really want to kill Jesus. Jesus has just been up all night in prayer and this morning has just called the Twelve. He comes down the mountain with them to a level place. The huge crowds gather, and He goes back up a bit to a place where He can sit and have His disciples come to Him. Luke 6:20 gives you the true audience of the sermon, *And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."*

Vs. 3-12 The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' orientation for His disciples. For your reading, imagine that all the "blesseds" are choices you make or don't make in following Christ as a disciple in reaching out to a lost world as Christ did. You can choose to be poor in spirit now, or

not. You can choose to weep now, or not. This means you can opt to live a comfortable, non-focused life, making the decision to be burdened, or not burdened, by this calling. The burden leads to blessing.

Vs. 13-16 Notice that the call to follow Christ as a disciple means working in the harvest as *salt* and *light*. Everyone who knows Christ should be salt and light. This is why the Lord has left us on earth, and this is the way we are close to Him, following Him. Inherent in what Jesus is saying here is our option not to obey.

Vs. 17-20 Jesus begins to re-adjust the way the disciples have been taught to think about God and obedience. What He says here will give the explanation for what follows in *you have heard that it was said* (v. 21-48). When Jesus is referring to the law here, He means moral law, not the ceremonial laws and rituals, the sacrifices, cleansings, etc.

V. 20 would have blown the disciples away. These religious leaders were looked on to be the most righteous and heaven-worthy of all men in their society. Jesus is about to show them that true following is in the attitude of faith, obedience and love toward God.

Vs. 21-26 It is interesting that Jesus begins with this one. The new commandment that Jesus will give His followers later is to love one another. What He says here is really key to loving one another and loving our neighbor.

V. 21 Note that Jesus doesn't say, "It is written." He is referring to how the leaders taught this.

V. 22 Jesus is saying that if you have the attitude, you are guilty without committing the act. Notice that this applies to insults and calling someone *fool*. As disciples our hearts, our understanding of life, and our focus on Christ have to lift us above these attitudes. We are all guilty of this. In any election year you can hear Christians "murdering" politicians, hurting their own hearts and bringing shame to the name of Jesus. Disciples are not supposed to be doing this.

Vs. 23-24 Allow me to paraphrase this through the filter of some conflicts I have seen between believers in the church. What is interesting here is that the offended party didn't come to church. The offender is in church and everything is fine. The person who is not at the temple worshipping is probably at home calling the other "fool" in his heart and is the one who was harmed to the place of isolation. Now, it could be that the person doing the offering didn't mean to offend the guy who is not at the temple worshipping, but even knowing the other guy was offended meant he had some connection and needed to try to be reconciled to the other. Care for our brother is more important to God than offering or attending church in peace.

Vs. 25-26 Later, Jesus will use this same example to tell the multitudes to be reconciled to God. Here, the story seems to imply that if you don't reconcile quickly with someone you've offended, then the offence might become a permanent resentment that will always be there exacting some sort of harm to the relationship. If so, married people should take heed and reconcile quickly. Unfortunately, churches are full of this stuff too.

The bottom line is that rotten relationships can hurt disciples. The basis of loving one another in the work of the harvest is forgiveness and reconciliation. If we don't do it, it can keep us from being as fruitful as we could be.

Psalm 5

It is possible that David ran from Saul for about 10 years. In order for Saul to smooth this with the people, he and his leaders spread lies about David. You sense the injury these lies meant for David. It was through this pain and suffering that God led David to Him and His Word. This was David's education in becoming a man after God's own heart.

Vs. 1-3 David had lived the high life after Goliath. He was a hero, had a good bank account and was a son-in-law of the king. All he did turned to gold, until Saul's jealousy and hatred was

directed toward him. Now David was homeless and in danger every day. David's focus went to God, his true King. David's life became simplified because the only hope he had was in God. That David sought God made him the great follower that he was.

Vs. 4-6 Israel was full of talk and lies about David. It seemed like no one would listen to the truth and David really couldn't defend himself, running as he was. Yet, David had to rest in the Lord. God doesn't tolerate wickedness. David had to learn to wait on the Lord. David waited a long time.

Vs. 7-8 This is what David learned and it becomes the testimony of David. God's *steadfast love* never failed him and David's heart sought the joy of simply being in the presence of God. Amen.

V. 8 is also expressed again in Psalm 27:11. David wanted God's very plain and certain leading every day.

Vs. 9-10 Note that Paul quotes v. 9 in Romans 3:13 regarding the incurable sickness of sin. Just as Jesus said, sin directed against those following Christ is ultimately directed against Jesus and against the Father. All sin is a rebellion against God.

Vs. 11-12 To me, these verses are the real challenge in following Christ. Understanding that we are safe in God and there is no need for despair or anxiousness, we should be joyful. Apparently before this joy, you have to learn the deep crying out of the first verses.

Remember that these psalms were sung in worship.

Proverbs 1:24-28

These words seem hard but they are just. God is not mocked. In the OT, we are about to see the amazing patience and love of the Lord. He will give Israel chance after chance, over hundreds of years. He will forgive and be patient beyond anything we could imagine. But when people have refused to the place where their guilt is overflowing, God will judge. That is the same in our world. We just don't see or perceive it.

V. 28 Compare this verse with Luke 13:23-28. It is sad but true, and God will be totally just in doing this. Jesus also expressed this in John 7:34 and 8:21. Both contexts are very sobering.

I think, in God's love, I've experienced and learned in this way of having ignored God and then suffered the results of my foolishness; but by God's grace, there has been restoration. God's grace knows no end for those who are willing to come to Him and heed His voice.