of nations.” At 99 years of age, Abraham was beginning to see God’s promises come to fulfillment. The wonder of having a child at 100 years old moved him to laughter (18:17), but he was serious about the covenant and willingly endured circumcision at 99 years of age to show his devotion to Yahweh and His plan. One of the most delicate parts of the body, the part from where life begins, now bore the symbol of God’s promise to him.

 Abraham knew God was righteous, so when he learned of God’s plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, in a fascinating exchange he humbly pled with Him for the sake of the righteous in those places. He did not dispute the wickedness there, but he wondered about those who would be punished unjustly. The disturbing story in Genesis 19 illustrates the wickedness God was preparing to eradicate.

 Pursue faithfulness that combines words and authentic action.

Saturday, January 7, 2017—Genesis 20-22

 God’s grace is truly astounding. For a second time, Abraham told a king that Sarah was his sister instead of his wife, and for a second time Abraham was exposed with no harm done. Despite the deception, God still considered Abraham a prophet and assured Abimelech Abraham would pray for him (20:7). When pressed, Abraham told Abimelech he was sure there was no fear of God in the land (20:11). He knew what remains true today—an understanding of God’s sovereignty compels the leaders of the land to live with humility and to treat people with dignity.

 Fear turned to blessing as Abimelech allowed Abraham to live wherever he chose and as Abraham prayed for God’s blessing and restoration on Abimelech and his people. God does not approve of our fear and faltering actions, but He works in spite of them. Of course, there are consequences for sin and lack of faith, but God is not hindered by our weakness.

 Isaac was born and brought laughter to his mother (21:7), but the tension between her and Hagar only increased. The grace of God worked even for Hagar and Ishmael, though he was not the son of promise, as He continued to see and hear them in their time of need. The grace of God was sufficient for Abraham to take Isaac and prepare to sacrifice him though he was the only pathway to fulfilling the promises God had made to Abraham.

 God’s grace is sufficient because His vision is perfect. Thank Him for His gracious provision.

*Read the Bible Through 2017*

Week 1

Sunday, January 1, 2017—Genesis 1-2

 God is a creative God. From nothing He made everything through His spoken word. He could have on the first day spoken everything into being as it was on the sixth day, yet He didn’t. He chose to work over time, creating and cultivating a place for His image bearers. His admonition to humans was to fill the earth and subdue it. They, too, were to be a part of the creative process—bringing children into the world—and the cultivating process—caring for those children and the creation around them.

 He showed His power and expectations in Genesis 1, and He showed His personal side in chapter 2. The writer calls Him “God” in chapter 1 but refers to Him as Lord God in chapter 2. From the overall creation story in chapter 1, the writer turns to the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve in chapter 2. This creative and cultivating call is one of mimicking the all-powerful God, so He allows us to know Him personally as the great I Am so we might have the power and perseverance to accomplish the task.

 God not only allows us to know Him. He also gives us companions. For Adam, that companion was Eve. For believers, those companions are other Christians called to create and cultivate in order to obey and bring Him honor. Adam was given the ability to choose. Christ-followers, too, have the choice before them each day to obey.

 Pray for a life of God-honoring obedience.

Monday, January 2, 2017—Genesis 3-5

 Sin is destructive. The Hebrew uses a word for sin that pictures a twisting action. Sin takes what God has made good and perverts it, presenting it as something different than God intended. Once twisted, what God made good is damaged beyond human repair.

 Adam and Eve experienced this twisting and irreparable damage. They had all the fruit of the Garden, but Satan tempted them with the one thing they were not to eat. He made them question God’s intentions by making them question God’s word. Adam and Eve both did what God expressly told them not to do, and they immediately knew they were wrong. They had been wise along, yet now they were tainted, and they hid. God had to banish them in order to protect them.

 Sin is progressive. Adam and Eve disobeyed. Cain murdered, and Lamech celebrated his murderous ways (4:23). While Adam and Eve hid in the presence of God after their sin, Cain stood his ground when questioned by God about the whereabouts of his brother. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” he asked God Himself (4:9). Sin progressively dulls the spiritual sensitivity of the sinner.

 Grace is greater. God clothed Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness. He removed them from the Garden so they would not eternally be separated from Him. God put a mark on Cain to protect him from those who would want to harm him (4:15).

 Pray for a new year of walking with God in disciplined obedience. Thank God for His grace and truth.

Tuesday, January 3, 2017—Genesis 6-9

 “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (6:5). The conclusion was to wipe mankind from the planet, but every creature would suffer as a result. Sin corrupts everything, yet Noah for favor in the eyes of Yahweh (6:8). He was righteous and walked with God, and his family reaped the benefits.

 Noah obeyed the command of Yahweh, and he brought seven pairs of every clean animal on the ark (7:2-3) along with pairs of unclean animals. His family entered the ark, and God shut them in (7:16). Springs burst forth from the deep, and the floodgates of heaven opened. For 40 days and nights, water rose on the earth until everything with the breath of life in it was wiped out. God destroyed what He had made good because of the corruption sin had caused.

 For nearly 10 months, nothing was visible above the waters. For over a year, Noah and his family hosted the animals on the ark while God accomplished his work in the earth. When they were all able to come out, God made them a promise He would never repeat such destruction and commanded them to fill the earth once again.

 Consider where God has you on your journey. He may be using you fruitfully. He may be carrying you through a destructive storm. He may be waiting for you to repent. Pray for a righteousness and faithfulness.

Wednesday, January 4, 2017—Genesis 10-11

 The Bible is not a science book as it does not explain or teach scientific principles. The Bible is not a mathematics book in that it does not attempt to provide skills or techniques for problem solving. The Bible is not even a history book which tells the story of a people or nation, yet we can learn about how God did things, solved problems, and the peoples with whom God interacted as we read the Bible because the Bible is above all the story of God.

 Genesis 10 provides the names of dozens of clans and tribes which soon spread over what are now parts of Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. Some will wonder how this repopulation occurred. We cannot know all the answers because God is God. His ways are higher than ours, but the genealogies of Genesis 10 show survivors became fruitful and filled the earth once again. However God did this, we can be sure—He did it.

 We will continue to have questions as we ponder the ways of God. Those will spur prayer and study. What can be certain is that man will always wonder how God works and will always find ways he feels are better than the ones God has prescribed. Those who filled the earth in Genesis 10 began to plot how to make themselves famous and god-like in Genesis 11.

 Thank God for revealing Himself and allowing us to walk with Him. Seek a deeper relationship and fuller obedience.

Thursday, January 5, 2017—Genesis 12-15

 Like a funnel begins with a wide mouth and progresses to a narrow exit, so Genesis begins with a look at all of creation and the peoples of the earth. To be sure, several individuals make important appearances, but the narrative focuses in an important way on one man in Genesis 12. Abram is a descendant of Noah’s son, Shem, and to Abram God gives a call like no other—leave everything which gives you identity and security to follow Me.

 God was promising to bless Abram and use him as a blessing, something unthinkable if he left his family behind, yet at 75 years of age, Abram took his wife and nephew and went on an undisclosed journey. Genesis says he built an altar to worship Yahweh for His promises and then reports a famine afflicting the land (12:10). Obeying God and living in worship do not protect His chosen ones from difficulty. Obedience and worship do, however, provide a way to deal with life’s difficulties. Abram went to Egypt to find provision and demonstrated the immaturity of his faith by lying about his relationship with Sarai, but he later demonstrated the growth in his faith by allowing Lot to choose his grazing land first. Furthermore, he showed his growing trust by giving a tenth of his spoils of war to the priest of Salem (14:20). Ultimately, his faith that God could do the impossible made him righteous (15:6).

 Live today your belief He is your shield and great reward (15:1).

Friday, January 6, 2017—Genesis 16-19

 The blame game started in the Garden. Adam accused Eve, and Eve accused the serpent. We don’t like to take responsibility for our choices when they turn out badly. Sarai wanted a child, so she told Abram to sleep with her servant. When the plan succeeded and Hagar was pregnant, Sarai blistered Abram and mistreated Hagar. In His mercy, God sustained Hagar and her son, but the consequences of Abram’s and Sarai’s decision would affect every generation of humanity.

 Despite his flaws, Abram remained God’s chosen instrument, and God renamed him Abraham, transitioning from “exalted father” to “father