



My last sermon in Genesis was on April 7, 2024. I'd like to do a quick review to catch us up to where we'll start this morning. (All of these teachings are available in our archives at www.uniongrovewhitehall.org.) Genesis is where it all begins. The Hebrew name is Bereshit, meaning "in the beginning." I'm going to put some key things down for each chapter to bring us up to chapter 23 this morning.

Chapter 1 What is important is the WHO, not the how or the when. This is different from every other creation narrative in the near middle east. We are told that God made it all out of nothing. The Hebrew verb used is "barah." Only God can make something out of nothing.

Chapters 2-3 These chapters give the details of the creation of the world, and they culminate with the creation of man and woman. The story of the fall is the story of a created being choosing to obey self rather than God. Adam abdicated his role as a responsible authority, and Eve was deceived by the serpent who questioned what God had said. Satan always mixes a bit of truth in with his lies.

Chapter 4 This is the story of Cain (Hebrew Qayin meaning acquired) and Abel (Hebrew Havel meaning vapor). Cain's sacrifice did not please God because the intent of his heart was evil. This angered Cain who then killed his innocent brother Havel.

Chapter 5 Here is the story of Adam's descendents down to Noah. We studied the etymological roots of each name listed, and astonishingly, we found that the names sequentially mean: Earthling/Man – Appointed – Mortal – Sorrow -The Blessed God – Shall Come Down – Teaching – His Death Shall Bring – The Despairing – Rest & Comfort. We studied this together wondering if this isn't a coded message of the entire story of man's fall and the coming of Jesus the Redeemer.

Chapters 6-8 Angelic beings stepped outside of the boundaries that God had established and interfered with the DNA of human beings, producing a super race. We don't know the details of this and we don't need to know them. God tells us in His word what we need to know. This act was so offensive that the text tells us that *"⁵ The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."* (Genesis 6:5, ESV). Hence, God destroyed the earth with a great flood, and only Noah, his wife, and his three sons with their wives survived.

Chapter 9 God established a set of basic commandments for humans that are now referred to by Jews as the Noahide Laws. These laws have been interpreted by rabbinic tradition to include: no idolatry, no blasphemy, no murder, no theft, no sexual immorality, no animal cruelty, and the establishment of a legal system of courts and justice. This notion of restrictions on Gentiles will be reiterated when the Jerusalem counsel took place in 49 AD. It dealt with whether

Gentile Christians were to be under any of the Mosaic Law. Paul and Barnabas took the question to the Church fathers (including James the earthly brother of Jesus) in Jerusalem.

Chapters 10-11 Noah's descendants are listed and found to be living in the Plains of Shinar where they were becoming powerful. They built a tower now called Babel (because it was there that they were becoming too powerful). We are told that in their confusion, they were scattered over all of the earth. And then... the text tells us the geneology of Shem (one of Noah's three sons) that leads down to a man named Terah. Terah had three sons: Abraham, Nahor, and Haran.

Chapters 12-13 These chapters tell us that God called Abraham, and he obeyed. He headed off for a land he did not know and wasn't even sure how to get there. He only knew that God would be there when he got there. In the land of Canaan, Abraham and nephew Lot had need for more grazing land, so they split up and Lot took the green fertile land, leaving his uncle with the more barren piece of land.

In chapter 13 we are told,

¹⁴ The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, ¹⁵for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. ¹⁶I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. ¹⁷Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you." ¹⁸So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD. (ESV).

Note that God made promises to the Abraham in that place. Abram thus moved his tent and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are there in Hebron. There he built an altar to the Lord.

Chapter 14 Here we read the story of the ascent of Abraham. He becomes powerful and wealthy and has victory over his enemies. This brings him to a place called Salem where he meets a man whose name we do not know. His title is "Righteous King." This is the person we call Melchizedech (meaning "righteous king" in Hebrew). He is important in the panorama of faith as we will learn in the book of Hebrews that Jesus is a priest after the order (in the type) of this Melchizedech. This predates the order and priesthoods of Aaron and Levi, thus putting Jesus over those of that priesthood. The author of Hebrews will use this to argue that Jesus as Priest and King supercedes and predates any priesthood that came thereafter.

Chapters 15-16 These chapters chronicle the covenant that God made with Abraham. It is an everlasting covenant. Abraham is concerned about not having an heir. He tells God, "*O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and **the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?***" (Genesis 15:2, ESV). Congregation, take note of Eliezer and what is being said. Eliezer will become the main focus of our study on October 11). Would that we all could become as faithful a servant as Eliezer. Abraham is promised a son from Sarai (who doesn't come as fast as Abraham desires), so Abraham decides to "help God out" and has relations with

his wife's handmaid, Hagar. What a mess that made! Here is the origin of the Arab nations and much trouble for the Jews. We too get into trouble when we try to "help God out" when we become impatient with challenges that come into our lives instead of resting on God to deliver on His promises.

Chapter 17 This chapter introduces the ritual of circumcision which is the sign of the covenant between God and the descendants of Abraham. You will note that circumcision is practiced among Muslims and Jews even though it originated centuries before the advent of Islam. Physical circumcision involves cutting off excessive flesh from a man's private parts. Paul will explain that what is important for the believer is a "circumcision of the heart" by which we allow the Holy Spirit to remove the excess "fleshly patterns" that are still present in our soul.

Chapters 18-19 These chapters bring the visitation of two angelic beings who tell Abraham several things. They affirm to him that he will indeed have a descendent out of Sarai's own body, and they tell him that God is about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham goes into a curious bargaining with God to try to save the cities from destruction. In this, we learn that we too do not anger God when we wrestle with Him. You will soon learn that the word Israel means "one who wrestles with God." That is what we are doing right now as we wrestle with the Scriptures seeking to learn how we might apply them to our lives.

Chapter 20 Abraham once again messes up because he decides to walk by fear instead of by faith. He tells a half-truth to Abimelech (Father King), saying that Sarah is his sister. She was indeed his half-sister, but more importantly he hides the fact that she is his wife. Abimelech takes Sarah off to be added to his harem. God speaks to him and warns him not to touch Sarah for she is Abraham's wife. He gives her back to Abraham along with all sorts of treasure as a token of peace.

Chapters 21&22 We now see the birth of Isaac, the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, and a truce with Abimelech. God then commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, his one and only unique son. Before the sacrifice takes place, God provides a ram in a thicket, and the sacrifice is made. Many scholars think that this is in the exact location of the Holy of Holies on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. God uses a verb in Hebrew that means to have "experiential knowledge"(yadah). He tells Abraham that because of Abraham's willingness to obey God at great cost to himself, God now "knows by experience" that Abraham's love for God is steadfast and true. We too experience trials and tests that I suppose show God the depth of our faithfulness. Lets now move into Chapter 23.

Chapter 23 - Sarah's Death and Burial

23 *Sarah lived 127 years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. ² And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. ³ And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, ⁴ "I am a sojourner and foreigner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." ⁵ The Hittites answered Abraham, ⁶ "Hear us, my lord; you are a*

prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead.” ⁷ Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. ⁸ And he said to them, “If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar, ⁹ that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as property for a burying place.” (Genesis 23:1-9, ESV).

We see from the text that Isaac is now 37 years old at the time of Sarah’s death. Remember, she became pregnant with Isaac at the ripe old age of 90! She died there in Hebron where we just read that Abraham first pitched his tent. And Abraham was distraught. Something now happens that changes the course of human history. It was the custom that when a person died, they should be returned to the land of their birth. But Abraham did not contemplate taking Sarah’s body back to Chaldea. He asked the Hittites to sell him a piece of land in which to bury his wife. In fact, he asks only that the cave near the oaks of Mamre be sold to him. He asks the locals to go talk to Ephron about the cave. As a side note, I’d like to add that scholars for centuries said that no such civilizations such as the Hittites had ever existed. They presupposed it to be a fiction found only in the Bible. That is never the case. What the Bible says is truth whether men have figured it out or not.

Interestingly, in 1906 an archaeologist named Hugo Winckler excavated at Bogazky (Hattusa) and a huge treasure trove of royal archives was found that gave clear and convincing evidence of a Hittite civilization. So this people group that was only mentioned in the Bible, was lost in time for about 3,000 years until the early 1900’s. Sometimes we have to wait to see modern knowledge line up with the Scriptures. This should remind us of the accuracy of the Bible and the integrity of what we read in it. Anyway, we’ve now seen the plot of ground that Abraham desires, so let’s see Ephron’s answer.

¹⁰ Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites, and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city, ¹¹ “No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead.” (Genesis 23:10-11, ESV).

Ephron was using a bargaining tactic: he intended to sell the entire field. Extrabiblical Hittite laws suggest that this strategy may have allowed him to transfer the land’s tax obligations to the buyer.

¹² Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. ¹³ And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, “But if you will, hear me: I give the price of the field. Accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there.” ¹⁴ Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵ “My lord, listen to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead.” ¹⁶ Abraham listened to Ephron, and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants. (Genesis 23:12-16, ESV).

Ephron is pretending to be this magnanimous guy (or perhaps he truly was gracious and loved Abraham). But he mentioned the value of the land to give a starting price for the negotiations. This was a huge sum in that a person's salary was about 10 pounds of silver per year.¹ That would cause the cost of the field to be equal to about a million dollars in today's money (for a small field and a cave). What we learn from Hittite records is that this sum was great for the property that was being bought. It was most likely well above the value of the property. And what is interesting, is that Abraham didn't even offer less. Abraham just agreed and bought the field. He decided to let God work out the details of whether it was too much. Abraham didn't negotiate the price down because he didn't want any thought that part of it might be a gift. He bought the field and he bought it for good. It was never to go back into the hands of the seller.

¹⁷ So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over ¹⁸ to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city. ¹⁹ After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰ The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as property for a burying place by the Hittites. (Genesis 23:17-20, ESV).

So, Abraham became the owner of the land, and it was known by the "gates of the city." That's how they recorded deeds. The people that were at the city gates were the witnesses of all the deals that went on between people. When they heard the transactions taking place, they were the witnesses that a deal had been struck. And, they knew the terms of the deal. By burying Sarah in that place, Abraham was saying, "My hope is in what God promised me, and I will rest in that promise. And, I will act on that promise." So where does that leave us? I want each of us this morning to ask ourselves, "Are we trusting God with our lives and our fortunes?" Do we need to make any adjustments? Let us each put roots down in the place where God has put us. Let's invest in the people around us and in our congregation. By faith, let us each put aside any restlessness, and get busy to faithfully do our part to bring about the very best that God intends for each of us.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation

¹ John H. Walton and Craig S. Keener, eds., *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 56.