

Genesis Bible Study 7

Healing the Family – Abraham, God’s Friend: Can a Man be God’s Friend?

taken from

Salvation for the Social Order: For Those Who Haven’t Read the Bible and for Those Who Think Religion is Merely a Private Matter

by Philip E. Friesen

Reading: Genesis 12-24 – An Introduction to the Next Section

Bible Study Leader’s Introduction: Recommendations from the Author

- Sarah’s Shame
 - Until modern times in most parts of the world, the principal duty of every woman was to marry and give birth to at least one son. Failure to produce a son would, in most cases, be just cause for her husband to find another woman, as we see in Abraham’s story.
 - In Genesis 3:15 God told the Snake that in the future one male descendent of Eve would crush the Serpent's power.¹ This promise is written permanently in the human subconscious. I suspect that every man, to a greater or lesser degree, has dreams of becoming The Great Hero, and perhaps every woman has hoped to be his Queen Mother. But after the Son came, died, and rose again, the woman’s role among humanity began slowly to change. In more and more places, the woman need not bear a son in order to be significant. Surely this is one sign of what Jesus called the leaven working in the loaf.
- Discussing the Story
 - Having a son was the most important goal in life 4000 years ago. The tribulation of a family with no son is graphically portrayed in Abraham’s story, and should stimulate good discussion. The cultures of Asia and Africa are closer to Abraham’s time than we in the west. Do study the diagrams below. You may introduce the “family” topic before you begin, or you may want to wait until you study Genesis chapter 16. Either way should work, but my preference is to talk about family issues at the time when polygamy is introduced into the story. I recommend that you take some time to talk about your family, and ask them about theirs. Show them old family pictures. If you have records of when your ancestors came to North America, dig them out. I always find that stories about my parents and grandparents’ are much appreciated.
 - When exploring the text, keep the narrative moving, and don’t give a theological lecture. Let the story speak for itself, and then respond to the student's questions. If you are good at story telling, tell part of the story as an English listening comprehension exercise, and ask them questions about content, just to be sure they understand. I have selected only the most important passages to cover the main story. Feel free to supplement with scriptures I have skipped if you have time.

¹ That is, the venom of death.

Student's Introduction: Comments from the Author

In Genesis 1-4 we asked the question, "What does it mean to be human, or what is humanity?" We learned that humanity is a unified social organism growing from a relationship of trust between male and female (i.e. Marriage), and is designed to reflect the oneness of God in Heaven. The unity and peace of humanity was destroyed when the relationship of trust between heaven and earth was broken.

In Genesis 12-50 we will ask the question, what is family? Unity and trust are principle themes. See if you agree with the following definition: Family – the fundamental unity of human society, and the smallest microcosm of human society. This basic unit is based ideally upon a life-long commitment of marriage between a man and a woman, founded on love and dependent upon trust. How would you change or improve this definition?

Genesis 2:23-25: The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.²

The story of Abraham took place in the Fertile Crescent around 1800-2000 years B.C. This is more than a millennium after Egypt and Mesopotamia had developed writing, and when India was a new civilization. This is even before the earliest Shang dynasty records in China.³ The two major world powers at the time were Mesopotamia and Egypt. Abram and Sarah traveled the trade routes along the Euphrates River from Mesopotamia to Egypt, and then chose Canaan as the place to live. As an international person, I am sure you will understand their feelings as they adapt to a new location.

² In Hebrew man is "*ish*" and woman is "*isha*". Both have the same meaning, but with gender differentiation.

³ According to a display at the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

2 Models of Family

When you hear the word family, which of the two models do you think of first?

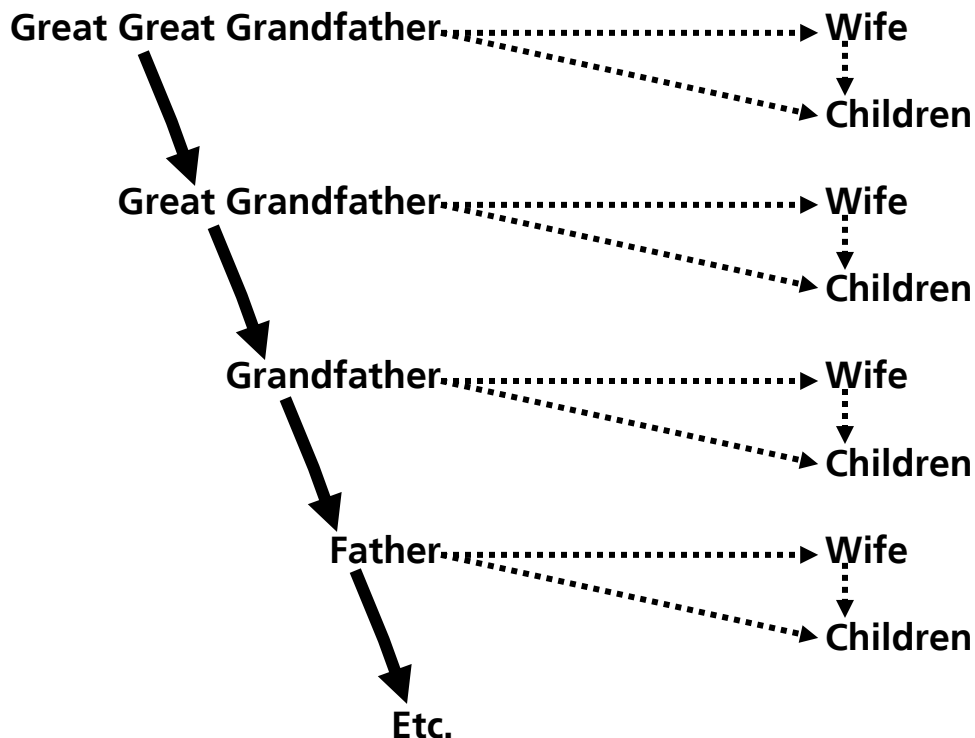
Model 1:



Problems with Model 1:

1. Isolation
2. Lack of social continuity
3. Limited sense of social identity
4. Unrestrained individualism
5. Self-centered universe with a limited perspective

Model 2:



Problems with Model 2:

1. Gender inequality – A wife is best, but still not absolutely necessary. A prostitute can also produce an heir (a woman is like a garden for planting seeds to raise children).
2. In-law conflicts interfering with marital trust and intimacy

Figure 1

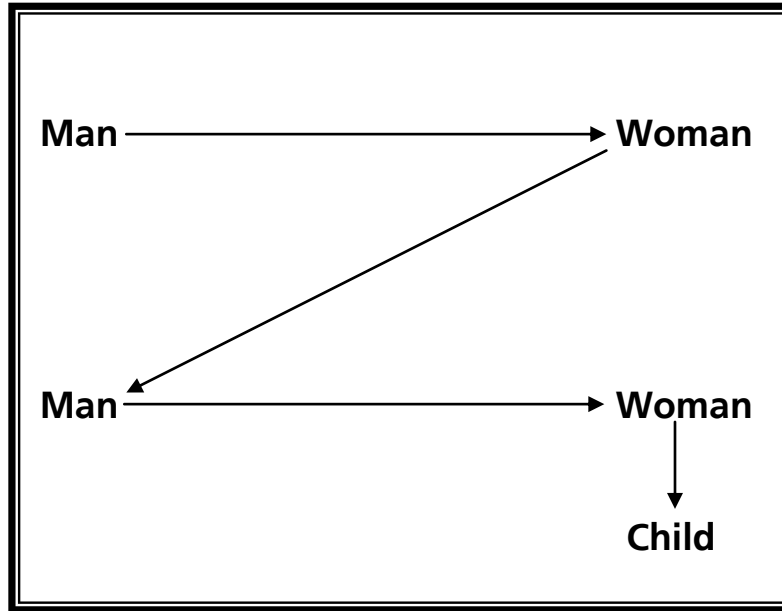


Figure 1 above shows the authority pattern that often accompanies Model 2 (from Two Models – above). The child is controlled by the mother, who in turn is controlled by her husband, who in turn is controlled by his mother, who is controlled by her husband, etc. In some places the grandmother will even apparently come back from death to communicate her will to her son, who must obey.⁴ In this model, the conflicts between wife and mother-in-law are proverbial.

Usually in this system a man becomes an adult when he acquires a wife. A woman attains status when she has a child, preferably a son. But the woman attains power only when she becomes a mother-in-law.

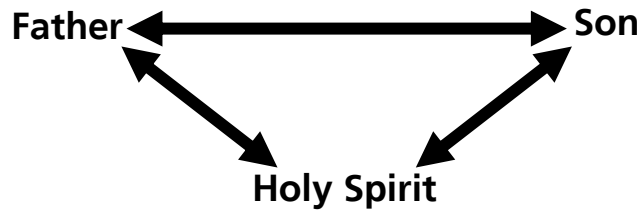
Unfortunately the man is always in a difficult position. He is caught between his obligation to be a loyal son and his wife's desire to be the equally respected partner of the marriage. The integrity of the marriage relationship is often compromised in this system.

Figure 2 (below) shows the combining of both Model 1 and Model 2 into a system whereby both the integrity of each new marriage is respected as a completely new family, separate from the parents, and yet joined with the parents and with all other families in community under the authority of the Creator. This is the ideal that reflects the unity and diversity of the Trinity.

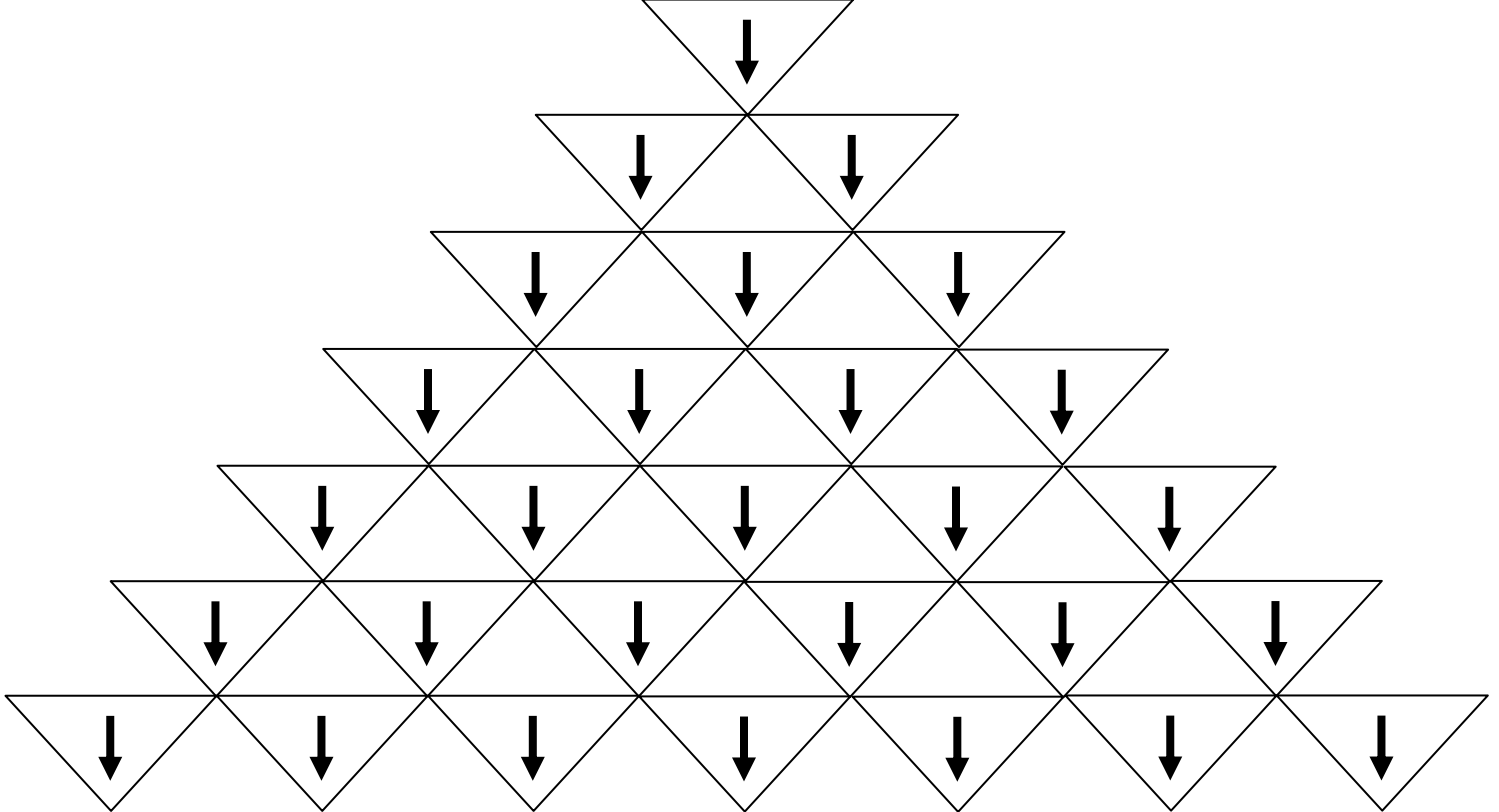
⁴ This was the case in the famous musical, "Fiddler on the Roof."

Figure 2

ONE HUMANITY REFLECTING
ONE DIETY



Adam Eve



Hatred in the human family insults God, because it poisons the family, breaks the unity, and shows a broken Reflection of God.

- Trust is the Measure of Relationship.
- Communication is the Lifeblood of Relationship.
- Absence is the Test of Relationship.