

# Bible Study

## Genesis: Origins



PART 2





# **Genesis: Origins**

## **Part 2: The Saga Continues... (Genesis 4-50)**

Stories shape us. Whether they are our own life stories, stories from our family's past, national history or even just some of the classic narratives of our culture, stories shape us. And Genesis is really where it all began. While it is a story that emerged out of the Ancient Near East and was written and preserved in the Jewish cultural context, it is actually our shared story whatever our cultural or ethnic background is. We might have other stories that help us understand how we got where we are, but through this story God teaches us where it all began. However, much more than a story about us, this is a story about God and the beginning of his relentless, loving pursuit of his people. At every twist and turn there is a whispered voice that calls us forward to Jesus, showing us our desperate need for him, helping us see our great hope in him, teaching us to live by faith in him.

Genesis is a grand story magnificently told. So let's try and do it justice as a story, as our story. Let's expect that God will teach us as we sit at his feet and listen to him tell us his story. So these studies suggest a way to read big chunks and allow them to steep – to read closely, but in the context of the wider story. We won't be dissecting the argument or teasing out the logic because this isn't an epistle, it is an exquisitely written narrative and one of the greatest works in literary history. Through it all, let's remember that this is a story written not only to inform us, but also to shape us as we understand our world better, our own hearts better, and above all our great God and Saviour better.

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# Study 1. The Fall That Keeps Falling...

## *Engaging with the narrative:*

### Read Genesis 3:8-24

- How does 3:12-13 summarise sin's reversal of God's good order in creation?
- How is the curse on the serpent in 3:15 also a promise of hope for humankind?
- In many ways 3:22-24 sums up the problem that the rest of the Bible sets out to resolve. Having turned away from God, Adam and Eve are banished from the garden – God's place where they experienced God's good rule. This is the introduction to life outside the garden – a life which is so very different to the way God created humanity to live. And it is the introduction to the great story of God's gracious, loving pursuit of his people to bring us home again.

### Read Genesis 4:1-26

- How does this chapter show an escalation of sin from Adam and Eve eating fruit they were commanded not to eat, through Cain's shameful murder of his brother, to Lamech's pride in his murder?
- How does this chapter describe God in relation to humanity? Is he present or absent? Gracious or vengeful?
- What picture does this chapter paint of life outside the garden? Would you say humanity seems to be improving or deteriorating since leaving the garden? Is this an optimistic or pessimistic view of humanity?

## ***Engaging with God:***

- How does Cain's response challenge us to consider our own response when we are confronted with the truth that our actions are not pleasing to God?
  
- How does this chapter present the universal human need for God's grace?
  
- For all the confusing aspects of this story (it's ok if it raises a lot of unanswered questions for you!), what is one way that it prompts you to give thanks to God?

## Study 2. The Flood

### *Engaging with the narrative:*

Read Genesis 5:1-9:29 (yes, all of it!!)

Obviously we can't dig deep into much of the detail here. Instead, let's consider the big sweeping movement of the story as it picks up from 'the written account of Adam's family line' (5:1) which began with three sons (Cain, Abel and Seth) through to the new beginning with another three sons (Shem, Ham and Japheth) and their account.

- We might have lots of questions about what is going on with 6:2-4. But the key summary verse is in 6:5. How does this describe humanity? If this were a movie and you were designing the backdrop or writing the sound track, what would it look like/sound like at this point? How does 5:8 contrast with this?
- Does God seem determined to destroy the earth or to save it?
- How does this story introduce the idea of God's covenant promises that he makes despite (not because of) the state of the human heart?
- How does chapter 9 describe life after the flood in ways that are similar to the original creation? Has anything changed in humanity?

## ***Engaging with God:***

- What makes us uncomfortable with the idea of God's judgment on all people?
- How do God's promises cut across the reality of our hearts?
- What is one way that this section of Genesis prompts you to give thanks to God?

## Study 3. A Very Broken Family Tree

### *Engaging with the narrative:*

Read Genesis 10:1-11:32

Not many of us find the genealogies of the Old Testament very engaging, but perhaps that's just a reflection of our Western individualism. Apart from names and places that don't mean a lot to us, note that there are a series of summary statements that describe where different groups settled. 10:32 is the main summary as it looks at the breadth of the family tree. The second half of chapter 11 takes a zoomed in view of one particular branch of the family tree to get to the specific person of Terah, father of Abram.

- With that in mind, focus on the story of the tower of Babel that sits in the middle of this section (11:1-9).
  - ◊ How are the human characters described? What attitude toward God do they demonstrate in their plans?
  - ◊ What is the pivotal moment in the story? Remembering what the inclinations of the human heart are, how is intervening to prevent the situation where 'nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them' an act of grace?
  
- Back in Genesis 3:15 there was a glimmer of hope for humanity in the curse given to the serpent. Is this hope visible at the end of chapter 11?
  
- What does this episode add to the story of Genesis so far with respect to humanity's relationship with God?



## ***Engaging with God:***

- What elements of the Babel narrative are 'typical' of the human heart? What attitudes of your own might be challenged by this story?
  
- Up to this point, the story has all been about our shared human origins – creation, fall, the spiral into sin leading to the universal judgment of the flood, our shared ancestors in Adam's line and then Noah's line, and finally the account of the scattering of humanity at the tower of Babel. What does all this say about our common condition before God? How do you feel as you reflect on this for yourself, your family, and the cultures and nations around the world?
  
- After a few weeks following the story of our shared human rebellion against God, what is one thing from this week that prompts you to give thanks to God?

## Study 4. Abraham Part 1

### *Engaging with the narrative:*

Read Genesis 12:1-19:38

- This section brings a significant shift in the story from the wide angle lens that has looked at all of humanity to the zoom lens that is focused on one family. What hints are there that God is going about his work to bring his people back to his place under his good rule?
  
- As you read through, jot down all the promises that God makes to Abraham and all the ways those promises were jeopardised.
  
- In what ways did Abraham demonstrate great faith, courage and integrity? In what ways did he demonstrate a lack of faith, courage and integrity?
  
- What indications do we get from these chapters of God's passion for righteousness and holiness? How does this fit with his promises to Abraham, who seems a fairly complex and compromised character?

## ***Engaging with God:***

- There are good reasons why some scenes in these chapters are viewed as foundational examples of Biblical faith. How has your understanding of what it means to have faith in God's promises grown through this story?
  
- What aspects of God's character are most on view through these chapters?
  
- Re-read Genesis 15:6. This is probably the most concise definition of righteousness in the whole Bible. It is not saying 'Abraham believed the Lord and he counted it as if it was righteousness'. Rather it is saying 'Abraham believed the Lord, and he counted it as what it is: righteousness.' Are there ways you find yourself tempted to secure your righteousness before God other than by simply trusting his promises?
  
- As you reflect on the story of Abraham so far, how does this prompt you in thankfulness for Jesus?



## ***Engaging with God:***

- How do you feel in light of Abraham's faith demonstrated in chapter 22? How does it challenge you to consider your own faith in God's promises and provision?
  
- A detail that we can easily miss in this story is that the mountain that Abraham and Isaac went to, in the region of Moriah, is identified in 2 Chronicles 3:1 as the site on which Solomon's temple was built in Jerusalem. In this way, the statement that 'on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided' (Genesis 22:14) takes on extra significance. How does this episode in Genesis 22 help us to appreciate God's generosity in giving his son, his only son, Jesus, whom he loves, as a sacrifice provided on our behalf?
  
- Both Abraham (22:13) and his servant (24:26-27) responded to God's provision in humble worship. How are you moved to respond to what we have read in this section?

## Study 6. Isaac

### *Engaging with the narrative:*

Read Genesis 25:1-28:9

- How would you describe Isaac?
- How would you describe Jacob?
- How would you describe Esau?
- Where is God's faithfulness evident despite his people's waywardness (or their stupidity, deceitfulness, cowardliness, rashness etc)?
- Genesis 25:23 introduces a theme that runs right through scripture: God's election. In what ways do we see the interface between God's sovereign choice and human decisions in this section?

## ***Engaging with God:***

- How do you feel about God's blessing being passed down through Jacob? Does it seem fair?
  
- Isaac seemed like such an important character in chapters 17 and 22, but in some ways he only has a brief cameo compared to his father and his son and a lot of what we do learn about him is a repeat of his dad's least impressive qualities. What might this say about God's dependence on people to bring his promises to pass? How is this a challenge to our pride?
  
- Are there ways this section prompts you to confession? Or are there things it prompts you to ask God to change in you? Take this to him in prayer.

## Study 7. Jacob

### *Engaging with the narrative:*

Read Genesis 28:10-36:43

- This is the story that establishes the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel. It is the story that gives Israel its name. It is the story that sets Israel in contrast with one of its nearest neighbours and all time rivals Edom (you might like to check out what Obadiah had to say about Edom to get a feel for their animosity). With all this in mind, you might expect a grand tale of virtue and victory. How would you describe it though?
- Can you recall how things panned out for Abraham when he started a family with his wife's maidservant? How is Jacob like his grandfather?
- Having come out of a pagan background, Abraham and then Isaac demonstrated an exclusive faithfulness to the Lord. Did you notice the subtle indications that all is not well for Jacob and his family in this regard? (see 31:19 and 35:2-4)
- God reiterated his promises to Jacob as he was about to leave the promised land in 28:13-15 and again when he returned in 35:10-12. How does this link the promises given to Abraham with God's original intent for humanity (such as we saw in 1:28 and 9:1)?



## ***Engaging with God:***

- In Genesis God demonstrates his capacity to take fallen, fallible people and bless them according to his good purposes. How does this point forward to the New Testament?
  
- Israel could never claim to have been chosen by God because they were spectacular or virtuous. How does this add to our understanding of God's grace for you and me?
  
- How does this account of Jacob and the beginnings of Israel prompt you to give thanks to God for his promises to us in Christ?

# Study 8: Joseph

## *Engaging with the narrative:*

Read Genesis 37:1-50:26

(Yes, all of it! Think of it as story time for grown ups)

Or break it into scenes to be drawn up as a comic strip:

1. Joseph leaves Canaan
    - a. The dreamer and the dreams (37:2-11)
    - b. The brothers sell Joseph (37:12-36)
  2. Meanwhile back in Canaan
    - a. Judah establishing a family (38:1-11)
    - b. Tamar's initiative (38:12-26)
    - c. The birth of Tamar's twins (38:27-30)
  3. The rise of Joseph in Egypt
    - a. Joseph in Potiphar's household (39:1-20)
    - b. Joseph in prison (39:21-40:23)
    - c. Joseph before Pharaoh (41:1-57)
  4. The family reconciled
    - a. The first journey (42:1-34)
    - b. The second journey (43:1-44:34)
    - c. Joseph reveals his identity (45:1-28)
  5. The family reunited in Egypt
    - a. The third journey (46:1-47:12)
    - b. Joseph deals with the famine (47:13-27)
    - c. Jacob's last days (47:28-50:14)
    - d. The brothers and Joseph reconciled (50:15-21)
    - e. The death and burial of Joseph (50:22-26)
- How is God characterised in this story?
  - How is Joseph characterised in this story?
  - There are subtle ways that Joseph fulfils God's purpose for humanity. God told humans to 'be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it' (Genesis 1:28) and having made Adam he 'took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.' Where do you see glimpses of this in Joseph and his work?

- We've seen the thread of God's promises to Abraham running right through since Genesis 12. At the end of the book, where do we see these promises beginning to be fulfilled? Where do we see them under threat? (Think of the promises in the categories of land, descendants, relationship with God, blessing to the nations). You might like to consider how Genesis 15:13-16 sheds extra light on this question.
- As we come to the end of Genesis, how would you describe the fledgling nation of Israel?

### ***Engaging with God:***

- How does the example of Joseph's pursuit of godliness even at great personal cost challenge or encourage you?
- How does the story of Joseph encourage you to trust God's character even despite circumstances?
- How does the story of Joseph encourage you trust God's promises even despite circumstances?
- As we come to the end of Genesis, can you summarise your reflection on this wonderful book in one big idea? How does this give you a greater appreciation of Jesus?



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