

How to Read Genesis

This first great hurdle in Bible Study is the foundation of the whole story. **Genesis** is all about Jesus, everything He is and does, and it outlines everything that really matters in this life:

- ~Why we live at all
- ~Why we die
- ~Why God became one of us
- ~How His dying on our behalf allows us to live forever

It is a real hurdle though, an obstacle that has led many to stumble and quit. *Genesis* can be very difficult to read, and even harder to understand that there is a *Jesus-centered* message on every page. But, if you can clear this hurdle, then the rest of the story is laid out before you. The entire Bible will come together because you will now understand the threads that make up the tapestry.

How then, does one approach three thousand year old text to determine how it explains the most important things in your life today? The only way that works: BREAK it into pieces, take it slowly, and study strong commentary about how our Christian ancestors have understood it as well.

Genesis is a long and complicated book by Bible standards-50 chapters-but it can be simplified by dividing it into four roughly equal parts: Origins, Abraham, Israel and Joseph. The Origins are especially profound because they explain the foundational questions noted above. The beginning needs to be covered very slowly to better comprehend the answers to these questions.

After passing down eons of time, and winding across thousands of years of human history, the story funnels down to focus on a single man. This one man (Abraham) is promised by God that all of the world will one day be blessed through his Descendant (Jesus). The rest of *Genesis* is deeper study of Abraham and the first generations of his family, specifically his grandson Israel and his great grandson Joseph.

Abraham begins a nineteen century bloodline that ends with Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem. Eighty percent of the Bible is the story of Abraham's descendants, their triumphs and travails across time: tribes and land and kings, whose primary purpose was to bring the God-man Jesus to all of us.

The Bible is the story of God coming to Earth to return us to Paradise.

If ever your understanding of the reading strays too far from this point, then you are a little lost, and you need to find your way back to this singular path to Paradise. Knowing the first generations in the Abraham-Jesus bloodline will keep you on the trail. It will also improve your comprehension all along the way because the original characters from **Genesis** are referenced at every step of the journey.

Origins

The Beginning is especially difficult for modern readers. It was written thousands of years ago to explain life's meaning, but it does so in a literary style that is no longer seen or taught. With two distinct stories of creation, one immediately sees that what we are meant to know is presented in layers, with great depth.

- Genesis 1 is familiar to many in its rendering of the creation story. The claim that there is but One God was a very radical concept. This first chapter also describes an ABSOLUTE BEGINNING, a critical scientific and theological union that is no longer refuted from either direction.
- Chapter 2 describes Paradise,-living forever with God, as the original plan. Jesus mission is to bring us back home to Heaven, as stated from the Cross: "Today, you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).
- Chapter 3 is the most important chapter in the Old Testament because it describes both the predicament and the plan. **It must be studied very slowly, line-by-line, to understand that self-interest is the foundational problem we all share.** Deciding for ourselves what is wrong and what is right is the message. The fruit from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" represents the ability to DECIDE what is right and wrong...and it is what we stole from God. It remains the primary problem we have...the source of all the others. Only now does death enter into the story as a punishment for choosing self over God.

Mercifully, God immediately promises a Saviour who will return us to Paradise and defeat Satan, "the seed of a woman"-one who would crush his head (Gen 3:15). The Serpent had not won. He had not accomplished our complete destruction-and eternal separation from God. There would come another, a God-Man born of a woman and God, who would return his resurrected people to Paradise-and immortality. It is an amazing story, it is your story, and it is the one story that really matters at the End.

After the fall from Grace...and our temporary loss of Heaven, the rest of the Beginning (Origins) is about the populating of Earth in our fallen state. It includes several familiar stories that foreshadow Jesus in the likes of Abel, Noah and Shem. In a dozen pages, it covers thousands of years of human history. It winds its way through time to the one man who will be the beginning of the people of God, the people who will produce the Saviour.

Part 2: Abraham

This second quarter of Genesis begins with God's Promise to Abraham, who was then known as Abram. God promises Abram an abundance of descendants who will be given a bountiful land 1), grow into a great kingdom 2), and bless ALL the nations of the world 3). This Three-fold Promise is the framework for the rest of the Bible, and it plays out in this order, step-by-step, over the centuries.

The Promised Land is entered six centuries later under Joshua (1), a Great Kingdom is established nine centuries later under David (2), and all the world is blessed nineteen centuries later when Jesus defeats death (3). The mother of Jesus immediately understands her role in the story when she references this ancient **promise** at her acceptance of God's *proposition* (Lk 1:55).

These dozen chapters on the life of Abraham are beautiful, and they begin countless themes that have subsequently played out over the last 4,000 years. Please read them carefully, because the human side of the Jesus Story is a straight line from here. Pay particular attention to chapter 15, when God makes a binding covenant oath with us. The COVENANT is an irrevocable family bond, so absolute in its nature that the punishment for breaking it is death. This is a crucial concept of the Jesus story, since it must be understood to explain the God of the Universe hanging dead on a tree. God has never broken any of the promises He made with us. But we have broken our covenant promises with Him repeatedly, in the most heinous of ways, and we have earned our broken-covenant death sentence many times over. Thus, the need for a "savior" who would die for us. Somebody had to die. A forever oath with God had to be "fulfilled"

one way or the other-all of us, or Him. Through incomprehensible mercy, He chose to become a man to die our death for us.

Good Friday and Easter Sunday celebrate different things: the Covenant broken by our self-centeredness is fulfilled on Calvary-at the moment of Jesus' death "It is finished" (John 19:30). The punishment for our selfishness (death), is conquered by Jesus defeat of death on that first Easter Sunday, "He is not here" (Matthew 28:6). Your understanding of the Passion of Jesus will continue to grow with a more thorough comprehension of **Genesis**: The Beginning, The End, and The Climax are closely linked in every good story.

Part 3: Israel

The second half of The book of Genesis has a decidedly different feel. Abraham's son Isaac is a prototype of Jesus in many ways, especially during his sacrificial binding on the hills of Moriah (Gen 22). This is near what would one day be Jerusalem, along the same mountain range as Calvary; and it is an elaborate prefiguring of Jesus' sacrificial death. The text, however, gives Isaac's adult life but a single chapter, and then quickly moves on to his son Jacob and... the considerable detail it takes to explain his complex marital life.

Jacob's story is not told in a very sympathetic manner. His name means "to supplant," which is a nice way of saying "thief". Jacob's theft of his older brother's "Birthright" and then his "Blessing" is why he must run for his life to the distant home of his uncle Laban. There, he will spend twenty years working the fields-with his stolen blessing helping him along the way. Upon his eventual return, he is overladen with the fruits of his talent...along with a dozen children and their four mothers (complex). During his journey home, Jacob is met by an Angel who wrestles with him for an entire night. Thereafter, he would be known as "Isra-El" for "he who has wrestled with God-and persevered"...a solid upgrade from "Thief".

Part 4: Joseph

The final quarter of Genesis moves still deeper into the fourth generation from Abraham, and elaborates on the children of Israel. It is a bit tangential from the story in that it is mostly about Joseph, even though it would be a different son, Judah who would become the progenitor of the Jews in the bloodline to Jesus. The story of Joseph and his ability to read dreams is still very popular on stage and screen. It is especially beautiful in its example of forgiveness - the only request Jesus makes of us in the LORD's Prayer. Under Joseph's protection, all of the members of his family: his father Israel, his brothers, and all their children-70 relatives in all, are settled in Egypt to prosper. They are fruitful and multiply and thus ends the foundational book Genesis, with a happily ever after ending that would last for generations.

The stage is now set for the next book in the chronology, when a king comes to power "who knows not Joseph"...and then enslaves the Israelites out of fear of their vast Numbers. This bondage would last more than 400 years, allowing the families of the 12 sons of Israel to grow into 12 great tribes. They grow into many thousands of people awaiting deliverance, an Exodus from slavery, and a return to The Land Promised to Abraham so long before. This deliverance would be wrought by God Himself, and led by the greatest of all the Old Testament heroes, Moses.