



Class 2 - Genesis

Old Testament Seminar - Immanuel Church

Class 2: Genesis

Welcome back to our second class in the Old Testament overview! This morning we turn our focus from the whole of the Old Testament - where we looked last week - to narrow in on the book of Genesis. This is one of the few weeks wherein we'll focus on only one book because of how foundational it is to understanding the rest of the Bible.

Historically, the context for Genesis is actually hundreds of years after the last events described in the book. This portion of the Bible was written by Moses. *As a side note, there has been some discussion as to whether or not Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. I've provided a second handout that Capitol Hill provided that addresses this topic a bit for those interested in learning more.* As Genesis was being written, God was doing something special: creating a people of his own by which he would reveal himself to the world. And this book provides background for that people, telling them where they came from. But more importantly, it informs them of the problem God is solving through them, the problem of sin - and it prefigures how he will solve it.

Aside from straight historical context, however - the context of when and to whom the book was written - I'll introduce something each week called the "*redemptive-historical*" context. What I mean by that is where this book fits into the larger story of the whole Bible. As we discussed last week, the one story that is holding the Bible together is God's work in history to redeem, to rescue, to save a people by His grace and for His glory. So it's important where a book fits in that long story of redemption. So each week when we look at a book, we'll ask the same question. What has God been up to, what has he accomplished in his plan so far, up to the point where we are studying?

Obviously, the first few chapters of Genesis are at the very beginning of history. And, in fact, until we hit chapter 3 there is no need for redemption at all. But as we turn to Genesis 3, we will see that no sooner do our first parents plunge us into ruin, God begins his plan to save us from that ruin. Every week we'll be checking in to see where God is in that plan.

Part 1: Genesis 1-11

Theme and Outline

The theme of these chapters is simple: *God reveals his character through the world he has created.* And you'll see an outline for this section your handout that I hope you'll find useful in your own study.

The story of Genesis 1-11 unfolds something like this (you'll see it traced out along your handout): There exists an eternal and self-sufficient God, who by sheer verbal fiat has created the universe and all that is in it, in order to display his glory. The crown of his created order is mankind, the only creature created in God's image. Mankind display God's glory as they obediently govern the earth while enjoying loving fellowship with God and each other. But our first parents choose to set themselves up as equals with God, disobeying him and incurring the just wrath of God. While expelled from that pristine fellowship with God, they do not receive the complete wrath they deserve. In fact, God has already begun a plan to overturn the curse of sin by placing enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. As generations continue, the sin resident in the hearts of mankind goes from bad to worse (yet the seed of the woman continues). And even partial judgment of the world does not end the world of sin. And so rebellion against God continues.

In a moment, we'll look into how that story plays out through these first eleven chapters of the Bible. But as we do that, I want to leave a question with you. Genesis isn't just historical background for the Bible, it is the foundation for the rest of the Bible. So the question for us to think about together over the next few minutes: what would be missing in our understanding of the rest of the Bible if we didn't have Genesis 1-11?

Genesis 1:1-25

There exists an eternal and self-sufficient God, who by sheer verbal fiat has created the universe and all that is in it, in order to display his glory.

Let's read Genesis 1:1-5. [READ] What's the subject of this first sentence in the Bible? God. The creation account is primarily about God. The creation account tells us a lot about who He is, and, derivative from that, who we are. So in this class, and I recommend this practice for your own study, we will always ask first, "What does this passage teach us about God?" Only then will

we rightly understand what it tells us about ourselves as we consider who we are in reference to the Creator. So what do we learn about God?

- God is **eternal**. Verse 1 does not begin with an explanation of where God came from. This book about beginnings starts with God, who never began.
- From this first point, we see that God is **self-sufficient**. We see in verse 1 that he made everything out of nothing. God's word is so powerful that even that which does not even exist yet has to obey it! (Isaiah 55:11)
- And we see that God is **sovereign**. What God determines, he speaks, and what he speaks comes to pass.
- God is also revealed as **good**. Seven times in Genesis 1 God looks on what he has made and calls it good. And that's because God is good.

That's some of what we learn about God in this first chapter. And then we come to mankind.

Genesis 1:26-2:17

The crown of his created order is mankind, the only creature created in God's image, who display God's glory as they obediently govern the earth while enjoying loving fellowship with God and each other. Let's read Genesis 1:26-28. [READ] Human beings are presented as the 'crowning act' or 'pinnacle' of God's creative activity. And unlike every other creature, they fulfill a unique role in the created order. Let's look at that special relationship and role.

Notice in verse 26 that human beings are said to be created in the image of God. God made everything else 'after their kind' (1:12, 21, 24, 25). Human beings were not created after the pattern of some other creature, but of God himself – in His 'image', in His 'likeness.' God has reason, intelligence, memory, ethical norms, the capacity to love and have relationship with others, the ability to speak and communicate ideas, and so forth. That is what it means that we are created in His image. And so we have a distinct relationship to God, in that we have the ability to have a personal relationship with God. But being made in God's image also carries with it a distinct role in the created order. We are to take these attributes of God, which He has instilled in us, and thereby shine His characteristics all over the earth. In doing so, we image His glory to creation.

And now as we get into chapter two, we see this focus on mankind played out with a **second telling** of the account of creation that focuses on Adam and Eve.¹ Here is a clear picture of the

¹This idea of two tellings is not unique to Genesis; elsewhere in the Bible, say in the account of Deborah in Judges,

peace and harmony of this created order.

But this idyllic role for mankind was to be under the greater kingship of God. That's why we see that command in verses 15-17 [READ] If they do eat of it, what will happen? They will 'surely die.'

Now this tree was not a magical tree. It's not like they were morally unaware and once they ate from the tree they'd suddenly know good from bad. Nor are we to think of it as some kind of cruel tease, placed there by God as a way of tempting Adam and Eve. Rather the tree is symbol. It was placed right there in full sight, to remind Adam and Eve that, although they are given great privilege and many freedoms (in fact, freedom to eat of every other tree as much as their hearts desire), they are nonetheless not God. With this tree God is saying something important to Adam and Eve. "I alone have the right to determine what is good and what is evil, what is right and what is wrong in my universe."

Now, why is Genesis 1-2 so critical as a foundation to the rest of the Bible? Because it describes what the rest of the Bible is getting back to. Not until Revelation 21 is this fellowship restored, with God's perfect people again in God's place under God's rule. And so if you were to study Genesis 1 and 2, you'd see God's perfect plan for gender, for marriage, for work, for the physical creation, for government, for our relationship with God and with each other.

We've seen all that is revealed about God, and about ourselves, in these first two chapters. But notice how much is missing! If Genesis 1 and 2 were all there was, we would never know about God's commitment to justice, his patience, his holiness, or the glory of his mercy. Why did God let sin enter the world? I don't know. But I do know that the perfection of his character is displayed more clearly because of his plan of redemption that rescued us from sin. God is given glory in creation, but so much more in redemption. And that takes us to chapter 3.

Genesis 3:1-24

But mankind's first parents choose to set themselves up as equals with God, disobeying him and incurring the just wrath of God. While expelled from that pristine fellowship with God, they do not receive the complete wrath they deserve, for God has already begun a plan to overturn the curse of sin by placing enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

Look at verses 1-5. [READ] What a lie! The serpent of course is the devil (see Revelation 12:9), and we see first a lyrical, poetic account and then a more straightforward, event-by-event account.

he would have us think, “I am like God. I know what’s good and what’s evil. What’s worthy and unworthy of worship. What’s weighty and of great consequence and what’s not.” It’s arrogant. It’s idolatrous. It’s insane.

But sin didn’t work. Both Adam and Eve fall for this lie, and immediately, in verses 7-8, they are not behaving like gods, but like people ashamed of what they’ve done. They now hide from each other in verse 7, and they hide from God in verse 8. The death that was promised as a consequence in 2:17 has begun.

And how does God deal with these rebels? All of them, the serpent, Eve, and Adam, fall under God’s curse. But there is grace. Adam and Eve are not destroyed on the spot. And he gives hope for redemption.

Look at verses 14 and 15, God’s words to the serpent. [READ VERSES 14-15] God says that He is putting enmity, that is, “hostility to the point of killing each other,” between two parties. There are three levels of enmity here. The first, it says, is enmity between the devil and the woman. What does that mean? Well, it means that Satan and the human race are enemies. It may not sound like such a great plan of redemption to us if the first thing God does is make us enemies to Satan. But... consider the alternative. The alternative would be to be friends with Satan and therefore permanent enemies of God. So God is saying that humanity still belongs to Him. Satan cannot steal away His image-bearing creatures. They still belong to God. So enmity with God’s enemy is a good thing.

The second level of enmity, it says is where? God says it’s between the woman’s offspring (literally “seed”), and the serpent’s offspring (or “seed”). A pronouncement that humanity will be divided into two camps. One is called the “seed of the woman.” And that other is called the “seed of the serpent.” Of course, everyone will physically be descendants of the woman Eve (since she is the first mother of everyone). Nonetheless some of those physical offspring of Eve will spiritually be the “seed of the serpent.” That means that they will, like Satan, not obey God, but will throughout their lives fall for the deceits of the devil. Think of 1 John 3:8: “He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning².” (see also John 8:44) Others, though, will seek God. And this verse is saying that these two groups are irreconcilable. (See also John 15:9, 1 John 3:13)

Now, the third level of enmity is the most crucial. Look again in verse 15. It ends by saying “he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Suddenly God is not talking about a group of people, a line of descendants. Instead He is speaking about one descendant who will deliver the

²The next verse, 1 John 3:9, contrasts this group with those who are born of God - who have his “seed” in them.

fatal blow to the devil, and end the enmity. Do you see that there? He is using singular pronouns: “he” and “him.” Out of the woman’s seed will arise one man who will crush the head of Satan, thereby ridding the creation of the deceiver that initiated this whole mess. However this One Seed will not come out of the battle unscathed. His heel will be struck. Who is this? Jesus, of course. (See John 1:31-33, Col 2:13-15, Heb 2:14-15)

Genesis 4

As generations continue, the sin resident in the hearts of mankind goes from bad to worse (yet the seed of the woman continues)...

Well, the rest of the Bible now is an outworking of Genesis 3:15 – the three levels of enmity being played out in history. Satan is always trying to destroy God’s image bearer. And more specifically, he is using his own spiritual seed to corrupt or destroy the godly descendants of Eve.

In the very next chapter we see Cain killing Abel. So has the serpent won? Is the godly line ended? No. In verses 25 and 26 Adam and Eve have another son to carry forward the line that will someday birth the savior. But as the story continues we are again and again brought to wonder: will Satan win at snuffing out the line? Or will the promises of God be fulfilled? Consider the flood. Was Satan able to corrupt humanity so badly that God would destroy them all? No, by his grace he delivered one family. Will the promises to Abraham, through whom the Seed will come, fall to the ground because his wife is barren? No, God will miraculously provide a son. Will the descendants of Abraham be snuff out by a famine? No, God will send a savior ahead of them to Egypt in their brother Joseph. And so forth. Finally, it looks as though the devil has won when Jesus is dying on the cross. But that’s actually Christ’s victory, not his defeat, for there He defeated sin.

Genesis 5

As we move into our next section, in chapter 5, which lists out the godly line from Adam through Seth, we see this theme continue. It’s a record of God’s faithfulness to his promises. But death lingers as part of the curse. These verses all end with the same phrase: “and then he died.” “and then he died” - a constant drum beat, reminding us of the dreadful certainty of what awaits sinners in this world, even those who are of the “seed of the woman” and mean to be obedient

to God. They are still sinners.

Genesis 6:1-9:17

...and even partial judgment of the world does not end the world of sin.

In chapter 6 we see more of mankind's descent into depravity and evil. And in verse 7, God announces his judgment: essentially reversing the creative acts of chapters 1 and 2. The flood. That this judgment is meant to be understood as an un-creating of the universe can be seen most clearly in chapter 7. Look at verses 11-12. In chapter 1, verses 6 and 7, we read about how God separated the waters below from the waters above (that is to say in the clouds in the atmosphere). Then in verses 9 and 10, about how He separated the waters of the sea to make room for dry land. Well now, in this flood account, the sea is bursting forth to swallow up the land, and the skies are dumping all their rain.

But again, God's wrath is mixed with mercy, for he will not fail to deliver his promised Seed. In the midst of God's wrath, through the ark, God has Himself provided a way of escape. And that leads to a re-creation. Look at 8:17. [READ] Again, the language here is plucked right out of Genesis 1 and 2. God is starting over again, the old promises of Genesis 3:15 still intact.

Okay, so man has become exceedingly sinful. And God has judged him for it. Yet all the while God has still had grace on mankind, and He's still faithful to His promises. But why did we need to go into all that detail about judgment taking on the form of un-creation, and grace taking on the form of re-creation?

Well, I want to introduce you to something called typology. Typology is this: God in His providence has done things in the Old Testament – caused events, created institutions, used people – that are types of the things he will do in the future. Generally things about Jesus. God has carried His plan of redemption forward in the Old Testament in such a way to get us ready for Christ. So the flood narrative in Genesis, the un-creating and the re-creating, is a picture of a future, cataclysmic undoing and redoing of the universe. Not by water this time, but by fire. The flood was a real historical event. But the next time will be a far more terrible judgment, and the re-creation will be a return to paradise. Because at that second coming of Christ sin will be eradicated for good. Turn to 2 Peter 3 for a moment. Look at verses 5-7, [READ] and verses 11-13. So Noah's flood is both historical event and a picture of a greater judgment and re-creation at the end of time. It is a "type" of judgment - prefiguring the final judgment. Thus the language of "typology."

As we move through the Scriptures we will see many other Old Testament events, institutions, and persons prefiguring Christ's work like this.

Genesis 10-11

And so rebellion against God continues.

But though creation is re-made, the problem of sin remains. And so first Noah, and then the entire human race, show their sin as we move into chapters 10 and 11. In chapter 11, the Tower of Babel, humanity wants a name for themselves. But weren't they supposed to about the business of promoting God's name, and God's glory, not their own? And furthermore, they don't want to be scattered over the earth. But weren't they commanded to multiply and fill the earth, by spreading out? Once again we see mankind ignoring God's right to rule and foolishly determining his own agenda in the world. Well, as expected, God will not allow such mutiny. Their plans are halted, and the nations are created, who will not come together again until this part of the curse is reversed when Jesus inaugurates the multi-ethnic church.

Part 1: Summary

And that takes us through these first 11 chapters. So let's go back to my earlier question. What would we lose if God had simply started the Bible with Genesis 12 when God's story of redemption begins in earnest with Abram?

- Chapters 1 and 2: God's perfect design, the reality of our past and future, and our guide for the present.
- Chapters 3-11: the nature of our sin. Not until Romans 1 will we again see in the Bible such a plain depiction of the absolute and whole-hearted rebellion of mankind against its creator.

What we are seeing here in these crucial chapters of Genesis is what happens when sinful man intersects with a holy God. There is just consequence for sinners' actions. But there is also a patient and gracious response from a loving God. Redemptive-history has begun. God has set out on His course to redeem fallen humanity and the corrupted universe. He is out to restore the pristine environment and perfect peace, love, and fellowship that existed in the original creation. To do this He will deal with sin and conquer death, through keeping the promise which He made the woman that one of her descendants will triumph over the enmity of Satan.

Part 2: Genesis 12-50

“‘Is anything too hard for the Lord?’” (Genesis 18:14). That’s God speaking. Abraham was about 100; his wife Sarah about 90. God had just told them that they were going to conceive a child, their first together, after decades of barrenness and aging – within about a year’s time. And they laughed at Him.

Abraham laughed out loud. And Sarah laughed to herself. What God promised them was so ridiculous and so preposterous, so ...*inconceivable*... it simply couldn’t happen. Their bodies were as good as dead. God must have been joking, or insincere, or perhaps even mistaken. And so they laughed. And God corrected them. He asked: “‘Is anything too hard for the Lord?’ At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.” (Genesis 18:14)

A year later, when a son was born to Sarah in her old age, God made sure they remembered their faithlessness. He commanded them to name the child “Isaac,” which means: “He laughs.” It seems the mocking laughter of their disbelief had been turned into a laughter of joy.

In this second part of the book we look at the second main event, which I just described - the establishment of a special family through Abraham.

So, what all do these 38 chapters in Genesis cover? They give us a view into the lives and families of Abraham, his son Isaac, and his son Jacob. (These three are also known as the Patriarchs). And understanding this family line is crucial to our understanding of the Bible. Because through them God begins to unfold his plan of redemption, which we can summarize in a few phrases. God’s special people, will live in God’s special place, under God’s special rule. People, place, and rule.

We can summarize this part of Genesis like this:

*God is making a gracious covenant with one man and his descendants which will bless the entire world. In this covenant God has promised to be their God. He also promises, unilaterally, that they will be His special **people**, that they will live in the **place** of His choosing, and that they will enjoy a unique relationship with Him, under His **rule**.*

Outline

As we move through this section, we are going to walk through the three generations of Genesis: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And help you understand how God’s plan of redemption unfolds

through them: God's people in God's place under God's rule. We'll start with a very brief summary of these chapters to give you context.

- (1) Abraham: The life and times of Abraham are found in chapters 12-23. They detail God's calling of *Abram* out of Mesopotamia. They reveal a progression of promises to him. Then, at the end of this section, God finally ratifies all that he has said to him with a covenant sign – circumcision – and a new name: *Abraham*. They also reveal a troubled family history for Abraham, both within his own marriage, and with his nephew Lot.
- (2) Isaac: The next section of Genesis, covering the adult life of Isaac, is found in Chapters 24-28. Famously, Isaac and his wife Rebekah had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Like Abraham's, Isaac's household was troubled with sin and faithlessness, a humbling reminder to us, their children in the faith, of God's enduring mercy and unshakable love.
- (3) Jacob: The adult life and family life of Jacob occupies nearly the entire second half of the book, detailing his multiple marriages and therefore severely troubled family life. But Moses draws our attention, once again, to just one of this Patriarch's sons: in this case, Joseph. This is the moving and extravagant story of the annoying favorite son, sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt and then into prison. From prison, God then vaults Joseph to the highest office in the land. Joseph uses this position to bring a fulfillment, in part, to God's promises to his great grandfather: to be a blessing to the nations. He delivers the nations, and even his own family from a devastating famine.

As you read through this book, you see the extravagance and unexpectedness of God's plan. Old women will give birth to sons, younger brothers will rule the older, arrogant men will be turned to humility, slaves will become rulers, and the homeless will be given a home. God's story line of promise and fulfillment is not a normal human story. At every turn is the unexpected and the impossible. Man's plans are consistently thwarted, and God's sovereignty is supreme.

You see, God has arranged his plan of salvation to encourage our trust in him. If he could accomplish reversals like those in this book, he can accomplish such change even in our lives and in our time, for his own glory.

By way of historical review, Moses is still our author. Starting in chapter 12, we can begin to assign some dates to these events. We'll pick up today with Abraham, whose story takes place about 2,000 years BC (give or take a 100 years or so). And we'll cover through the life of Joseph, whose death we can date somewhere around 1800 BC.

God and Abraham

OK. With that as background, let's turn to our text. We'll start with the story of Abraham. Turn to **chapter 12**, and let's read **verses 1-3**.

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

In these promises to Abraham we see God's purposes in His kingdom: His people in His place under His rule. We'll look at each of these components of the kingdom.

Let's start with God's *place*, the land God promises to Abraham.

In verse 1 God promises Abraham a land. This land is significant because you'll remember that with Adam and Eve's sin they were driven out of the perfect land of Eden. The land promised here to Abraham, the land of Canaan, was a real historic location. But it also serves as a picture of a greater reality to come – that new creation at the end of time. God is reversing the fall and reestablishing for Himself a people who will live in a certain place under His rule, like Adam and Eve did. It's not the complete return to Paradise, but it is a foreshadowing of it.³

Abraham and his immediate descendants understood this. In **Hebrews 11** we read this: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."

³Everything in the Old Testament needs to be understood as foreshadowing of greater realities in the New Testament. And those New Testament realities need to be understood as a return to the Edenic conditions God's creatures once enjoyed. So here is an illustration that the teacher may find helpful and can use if he deems it necessary: Consider a slide-projector. It has a light inside which shines through a slide, and projected up on the screen is a large beautiful picture. Well everything in the Old Testament (land, seed, blessing, kingdom, king, priesthood, sacrifices, tabernacles, temple, prophets, etc) are like the slide in the projector. By themselves they aren't very exciting. They are small and hard to see. You certainly can't see any detail. Well, they weren't meant to be viewed by themselves. They are all intended to go into the projector and be illuminated up on the screen. Then you can see all the colors and shapes and details that go into making a beautiful picture. So it is with the Old Testament. The land, the king, the priests, and so on, were never meant to be ends in themselves. They are meant to project forward to something far greater. It's as though the light behind them is the pattern in Eden, they, as the slide, serve as the pattern, but it's the New Testament reality that is the goal of the whole projector idea. As it says in Colossians 2:17: "These are a shadow of the things what were to come; the reality however is found in Christ."

This explains the true nature of the promised land – it is a heavenly city built by God and not man. But Abraham’s pilgrimage is also an encouragement to us. The record in Genesis is that Abraham wandered the whole of the rest of his days. In fact, the only plot of land Abraham officially owned during his lifetime was the grave-plot where he buried his wife. And just like Abraham, if we share his faith, we’ve been called from our natural home in this world, to God’s heavenly country. We are pilgrims who await the fulfillment of God’s promise. If we hold to this faith as Abraham did, we will share in these same blessings.

Secondly, notice that in **verse 2** God will make of Abraham a great **nation**. In understanding the development of the kingdom of God, this nation is God’s people. From Abraham will descend that Godly line, which originated with the woman Eve, who will eventually give birth to the Savior of the world. This is clear from the next verse, **verse 3**.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

While Abraham and his descendants make up one family, one nation, the blessing here is for all families. Through God’s special relationship with Abraham’s descendants anyone anywhere can repent of their sins and put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness, eternal life, and a relationship with God.

All well and good. But how is this going to happen? Turn to chapter 15.

God has promised Abram that he would make him into a great nation. Then, verse 2:

But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.”

Abraham was 75 years old when the promises of chapter 12 were made, and his entire life his wife, Sarah, had been barren. Now he’s beginning to doubt if he’ll ever have one son, let alone an entire nation’s worth of sons. So God reaffirms His promise to Abraham.

Continuing on in chapter 15, verse 6:

And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Abraham is counted righteous in the sight of God because of his faith. This is good news for Abraham after we’ve seen how sinful mankind is. Abraham is a sinner just like everyone else, but he is counted righteous because of his faith in God. This is a doctrine that Paul will often stress in the New Testament. In Romans 4 and in Galatians 3 Paul uses this very verse to prove

that the only way anyone can be righteous in the sight of God is through faith, and faith alone. The Bible is clear that no one can ever, through their good behavior, or good deeds, or church attendance, or baptism, or anything in themselves, earn this necessary righteousness. But we can be given it by faith.

So we've seen something about God's promise of a people - and in the obstacle God has sovereignly laid in the way (Sarah's barrenness), we've seen an important characteristic of this people: **Faith**.

Third, then, let's turn to consider God's rule over His kingdom. Now, significantly, this aspect of God's plan is not as clear in the story of Abraham. But that makes sense - because it's the part that the people failed to live up to in the garden of Eden. So God simply re-imposing his rule just doesn't make sense. Instead, God's rule will have to take a new form. And that is precisely what we see. Take a look at chapter 15, where God makes a covenant with Abraham. A covenant, in this context, is a solemn bond and agreement between two parties, with terms and conditions, that can only be broken upon the penalty of death.

In verse 8, Abraham has to ask - and I can certainly empathize with him - "how can I know that these promises will come true?" After all, God's promises to Adam and Eve depended on their obedience, and so they failed. What about these promises? God then quickly replies in verse 13: "Know for certain..." The ritual of animal sacrifice and mutilation that we find in the rest of this chapter is designed so that Abraham can "know for certain" that God will make good on his promises⁴. Because when it comes time for God and Abraham to ratify the covenant together, God puts Abraham to sleep and he does it alone. In other words - this is a covenant God will deliver on regardless of Abraham's obedience. It is a covenant of grace.

We'll visit the covenant many more times in our Old Testament overview. For now, we see that God is in covenant with Abraham, a covenant that will bless all the nations of the world as we

⁴But notice, if you will, that Abraham does not pass through the dead animals. Only God does. And notice that there are no obligations for Abraham to keep up his end of the covenant. There are only promises coming down from God! This covenant is completely unilateral, in that God has set all the terms, and entirely unconditional. God will keep these promises regardless of Abraham's and his descendants' actions. Now, this does not mean that Abraham's descendants will have no obligations at all. The conditions that Abraham's descendants have to meet will be added later? When will that be? [WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO ANSWER] They will receive some duties in Genesis 17, but the bulk of Israel's covenant responsibilities will be given from Mount Sinai, after God leads them out of slavery through His servant Moses. More on that later. The point I'm trying to make now, is that the promise comes before the obligations. So while Israel has real duties, and there will be real consequences if they are not faithful, the promises will still stand. This is because God's plan of redemption, of which this is a part, depends on His grace and His desire to renew the universe with a renewed humanity in it. It does not depend on sinful man. We've seen how far sinful man has gotten. Galatians 3:17-18: "The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise."

read in Genesis 12. But unlike the rule of God we saw in Genesis 2, where the covenant depended on Adam and Eve holding up their end of the bargain, this covenant is unilateral: dependent only on God. In chapter 26 we read about how the covenant promises are passed along to Abraham's son Isaac, and then again passed along to his son, Jacob, in chapter 35. In all of this we have people, place, and, though less clearly, rule.

So, why are we picking our way so slowly through this? For that matter, why does Moses suddenly focus in here? After all, chapters 1-11 of Genesis are cosmic in scope and global in scale. And then suddenly we focus in on God's dealings with a single man: Abraham. Why? Because in these promises we see the blueprint for God's plan of redemption, as he takes the pieces broken in Eden—God's people in God's place under God's rule - and begins to bring them back together. And that brings us to Isaac, because these promises given to Abraham are not fulfilled in Abraham's lifetime - but are passed along to his son. And so this family line becomes a line of promise - just as we saw in Genesis 3:15

God and Isaac

Well, Abraham does finally have a son. And naturally, the reader is wondering if this is the promised one? Well, as we read on we find out the answer is no. Isaac makes a lot of the same mistakes his father made, and he dies without seeing the promises fulfilled. But, he doesn't die without an heir through whom the promises can continue. So is his son Esau the one who will receive the blessing and carry the Kingdom of God forward? He is after all the firstborn. Surprisingly, the answer is no. His younger brother, Jacob, is the heir of the covenant! God has, through His free choice, decided that it is through Jacob that His plan of redemption will continue.

The idea that God chooses who will be his is one of the most challenging doctrines in the Bible. It's the doctrine of **election**. It's the doctrine that some will be given grace; and those "some" are chosen by God purely on the grounds of grace, not on the grounds of anything they've done.

Well, why would God choose one son over the other? Was Jacob more righteous than his twin brother Esau? Clearly not. Just read the following chapters. Jacob is a sly, deceitful opportunist. If you think Jacob was chosen because he was more righteous than Esau, or more faithful to God, then the rest of Jacob's story becomes very confusing. Let me tell you the explanation we see in Romans 9:

...when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though

they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad - in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls - she was told, "The older will serve the younger." – Romans 9:10b-12

Did you hear that? God chose Jacob before either twin had done anything good or bad. And the reason He chose Jacob *then* was so that "God's purpose in election might stand." And what is that purpose? So that inclusion in God's special family might come "not by works but because of Him who calls."

So do you see how critical the themes are that God is unveiling in this family? We've learned another thing about God's people right here: they become part of God's people by being called by God into faith. Not by being physically descended from Abraham.

We have no rights over God. We are all rebels. If we get anything good from God, it is by pure, one-hundred percent, vintage **grace**! And this grace is to God's glory. God's grace is meant to humble us, knowing that we have nothing to commend ourselves to God with; and it's intended to give glory to God for how kind He has been to us who know Him through His Son, and are included in His gracious kingdom.⁵

So through the family of Isaac, we learn a bit more about God's plan of redemption. Let's now zero in on his son, Jacob, to see what we can learn there, as the story of the seed of the woman continues.

God and Jacob

From Jacob will grow the great nation that God promised to Abraham. Abraham had only one legitimate son. Isaac had two, but only one was included in the promise. Now Jacob has twelve sons, and things really start moving. At least numerically-speaking, as Jacob's family (remember, God renamed Jacob Israel), starts to grow into the great nation God had promised. In particular, we focus on Joseph, one of Jacob's sons.

Let's briefly go through **Joseph's story**. Turn to Genesis 37:9-11. Joseph has a dream that his mother and father and all his brothers bow down to him.

This dream is a prophecy of Joseph's future role as savior. But his brother's aren't exactly pleased

⁵While there are a lot who would object to this doctrine on philosophical grounds, there is little argument that the Bible is clear about this. And while those philosophical questions deserve answers, and there are answers to them, they are beyond the scope of this class. J. I. Packer, Wayne Grudem, R. K. McGregor Wright, and (of course) John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards are good to read on this issue.

with their uppity younger brother. Verse 11 says they were jealous; by the end of the chapter, they've sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt. There, he's able to work his way up to a high position, but when he's betrayed by his master's wife, he's thrown into jail. After many years in jail he's finally released. But this time, by an amazing work of God, he's serving as the prime minister of Egypt! The Pharaoh puts him in charge of the food supplies for the nation. And when a famine hits, it's Joseph's wisdom and foresight, which he credits to have come from God, that saves the Egyptians. And he saves many other nations around them - including his family back in Canaan.

Now there are many things going on in this story that we could look at, but let's look at just one thing. Let's see Joseph's response when he encounters his brothers again after all his troubles, the same brothers who sold him into his troubles all those years earlier. Turn to chapter 45, and look at **verses 4-5**.

And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life."

Or, as he says later, in chapter 50 (verse 20): "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

Isn't that interesting? Joseph says that *they* sold him into slavery. They cannot escape the responsibility for their actions. But in the same breath he says that God sent him before them. Why? To preserve life from the famine.

What an astonishing reversal! What a demonstration of God's grace. We have real responsibility for what we do, whether good or evil. But finally, and ultimately, God superintends everything. His is complete and total control. And what's more, he uses that total control both to uphold justice and to demonstrate mercy, even as Joseph is doing here. Remember that from a theological perspective, there was more at stake here than just the people of Egypt. God had promised Abraham that he would use Abraham's seed to bless the world - a continuation of his promise to Adam and Eve of a Savior. And the threat of starvation for Jacob and his family threatened the extinction of the line through which God promised to save the world. So the impossible story of Joseph, who saved that family, really showcases the lengths God will go to to keep his promise. God really did intend these things for good.

Admittedly sometimes it is very hard to see how God is in control when so many tragic and disastrous things happen. We make no claim that we can understand what God is doing. But we can be assured that the universe is not spinning out of the control of its Creator. He is doing good things in every situation, no matter how hard it is to see. Even Joseph I'm sure at times

in his prison cell wondered what in the world God was doing to him. But nonetheless, here at the end, Joseph can see what God was doing: preparing to save many lives through Joseph. And yet as satisfying as that may have been, Joseph would never comprehend in his lifetime the real good that was being accomplished.

And we get a picture of that even greater good as we leave the book of Genesis. Turns out Joseph isn't the One Seed to come into the world. Rather, it will be through Judah, his brother.

Turn to **chapter 49**, and look at **verse 8**. This is a prophecy concerning **Judah**, one of Jacob's sons.

Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
your father's sons shall bow down before you.

Do you hear the language from Genesis 3:15 there – putting down the neck of his enemies? And look at **verse 10**.

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

What we have here is a prophecy that through Judah will come a ruler, a king, for the people. And that king will be the one who triumphs over Satan, crushing his head. Jesus, of course. The words of this prophecy are a little vague, admittedly, but this concept will become clearer as we continue through the Old Testament.

Part 2: Summary

So, then, an amazing journey through three generations to see God's plan of redemption beginning to unfold. God's people - a people called by God through faith. In God's place. Under God's rule - the rule of the promised Savior of the world. God's people, the line of the promise, has come under great attack through these chapters. And yet God has saved them. God's people remain intact. But at what cost! Look at the very last verse of the book: "So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt."

Are God's people still in God's place? Most certainly not. "Placed in a coffin in Egypt." That's why God himself had to appear to Jacob in chapter 46 to convince him to go to Egypt at Joseph's invitation, because Jacob understood the theological consequences of leaving God's place.

So... as we end Genesis, we're beginning to see God's people created. They are still under God's

rule. But they are out of God's place. We'll have to wait until next week to see how God takes action to bring his people back to their earthly home.

This material is adapted from a course with the same name developed by Capitol Hill Baptist Church. It has been modified for our purposes and has been condensed to fit our time schedule. The original version is available on their website at <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/core-seminars/series/old-testament-overview/>