

Genesis

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Genesis

Genesis is the first book in the Bible and the first book of the Pentateuch - the "five volumes" that make up the Hebrew *Torah*. The word 'genesis' comes from the Greek word *geneseos* meaning "origin" or "beginning." The name "Genesis" was given to the book in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, known as the Septuagint because its first word *bereshith* means "in the beginning". "Genesis" reflects both the content of the book and its Hebrew name because it is the book of beginnings.

Author

Moses is the traditional author of Genesis and the other books in the Pentateuch. On several occasions the Lord commanded Moses to write down His words *in a book*. e.g. Exodus 17:14, 34:27; Numbers 33:2; Deuteronomy 31:9. Moses is quoted as the author in other parts of the Old Testament. e.g. 1 Kings 2:3, 2 Chronicles 34:14 and in the New Testament e.g. Matthew 8:4; 19:8; Mark 7:10; 12:26; Luke 20:37. Obviously Moses could not have written some parts of the Pentateuch as they include a description of his death.

To write Genesis Moses would have used the records of past leaders and would have been familiar with the oral history passed down from generation to generation. It is possible that he wrote Genesis during his years in Egypt or while in exile with the Kenites.

There are many other theories for who wrote Genesis, the major one being the JEDP theory. This says that a number of authors wrote the book compiled from different documents focused on J (Jehovah), E (Elohim), D (Deuteronomy), and P (Priests).



Date

No-one knows when Genesis was written. Some scholars think Moses lived somewhere in the 13th century BC while others think he lived in the 15th century BC or even earlier.

Main themes

Genesis is the book of beginnings. In Genesis you will find descriptions of the beginnings of:

- the universe and the earth (Genesis 1)
- plants and animals on the earth (Genesis 1)
- people and their ability to have a relationship with God (through Adam and Eve – Genesis 2)
- the influence of Satan in peoples' lives (Genesis 3)
- sin and its consequences of separation from God and death (Genesis 3)
- the promise of a coming Redeemer (Jesus) who would save people from their sin (Genesis 3:15).
- the development of human institutions, professions, and culture in the Mesopotamia region.
- the spreading of people throughout the earth (through the Tower of Babel - Genesis 11)
- the Hebrew people who would later become the nation of Israel (through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)
- those who will be able to have a relationship with God by faith (through Abraham who is called the father of faith – Romans 4:11).

Overview

Genesis describes how mankind began through Adam and Eve and their sons Cain and Abel. It then shows how the effects of sin led to God's judgement on the world in the time of Noah and how people spread throughout the earth as a result of the Tower of Babel.

Genesis then describes the early history of the Israelites based on the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. These characters are all listed in the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, who God sent to be the Saviour of all who would put their trust in Him.

So Genesis gives us the early history of people and events important for bringing to pass God's purposes for His creation and its redemption through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Creation. Genesis 1:1-2:3.

The first two chapters of Genesis set the scene for all that follows:

- *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* God created everything out of nothing, by His word. Hebrews 11:3. God simply spoke and the heavens and earth were created. Psalm 33:6, 9. No-one knows when this happened. Some think it was millions of years ago; others only thousands of years ago.
- Initially the earth was *formless and empty* and *darkness was the surface of the deep*. The Holy Spirit was present on earth right from the beginning and was *hovering over the waters*.
- On **Day 1** God created light to separate the day and night.
- On **Day 2** God created the sky.
- On **Day 3** God created dry land and the seas. The land produced all kinds of plants, so it was covered with vegetation.
- On **Day 4** God created the sun and moon resulting in days and seasons and years.
- On **Day 5** God created the sea creatures and birds.
- On **Day 6** God created the land animals.

Plants and animals were made *according to their kinds*. God made each species distinct and unique, and there is no suggestion of evolution (although, later, some were able to interbreed or change slightly in response to environmental conditions).

- On **Day 6** God also created human beings.

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over the creatures that move along the ground. So God created human beings in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.

God blessed the human beings He had made and told them to *be fruitful and increase in number*. They were *to fill the earth and subdue it*. All plants and animals were given to them for food.

Then God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.

- On **Day 7** God rested because the heavens and earth were completed in their vast array. He had finished the work He was doing. God blessed the seventh day (Sabbath) and made it holy.

Adam and Eve. Genesis 2:4-25.

Chapter 2 gives another account of *the heavens and the earth when they were created*.

It expands on Chapter 1 (which shows the sequence of creation), by describing how human beings were created, and showing how people are central in God's creative work.



Genesis never tries to give a scientific explanation for the beginnings of the earth. To say that it does or doesn't fit with scientific theories is to miss the point of why it was written. Genesis simply states that God created the universe and everything in it, including the earth and all living things on it.

The Hebrew word for "day" *yom* means a period of time with a beginning and an end. It could mean a 24 hour time period but it could equally mean a period of time covering millions of years.

Genesis shows us that God created the universe, the sun, the moon, the earth, the seasons, the plants and animals, and that He created human beings. God is the great Creator!

Everything that God made was *very good*. God created the world exactly how He wanted it to be.

Initially, there was no sin in the world, but that didn't last very long!

God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

The Hebrew word for “man” is *Adam* meaning “man”, or “mankind”. This word is related to the word for “ground” *Adamah*. God made Adam’s physical body from the various elements in the ground (carbon, nitrogen, oxygen etc.). When he died he would return to these elements. This is described in Genesis 3:19 as *dust you are and to dust you will return*. What distinguished Adam from all other created organisms was that God gave him a spirit when He *breathed into him the breath of life, and the man became a living being*.

Human beings descended from Adam are also made of the basic elements of the earth, and have a limited lifespan. When we die our physical bodies return to the earth as dust. Our spirits, though, are eternal and enable us to fellowship with God, and give Him pleasure. That’s why God made the first man, Adam, and that’s why He created you! Revelation 4:11.

God put *the man He had formed* in a *garden in the east, in Eden*, where there was plenty of food and rivers for water. The Garden of Eden was probably located near the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in modern day Iraq. It contained two important trees: *the tree of life* and *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. Adam was told to *take care* of the garden and gave names to all of the animals. He was forbidden to eat from the tree of good and evil because then he would *surely die*.

Adam had no *suitable helper* so God created a woman, Eve, out of his ribs as he slept. The Hebrew word for “woman” *ishshah* means a feminine person. Adam and Eve were *both naked* – indicating that they were pure and as yet undefiled by sinfulness.

Men and women were created by God and are loved by Him equally. He created human beings for fellowship and He still delights when we freely give Him our love. In Galatians we are told that that in Christ *there is neither male nor female* for we are *all one in Christ Jesus*. Galatians 3:28. This is how God originally designed us to be. Men and women living in harmony with God and His creation; living to fellowship with God and give Him pleasure.



The fall. Genesis 3:1-24.

Now comes the saddest moment in human history. Adam and Eve had a free choice to obey or disobey God but they chose to disobey. Eve was tempted by the serpent and listened to his lies. *Eve saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and also desirable for gaining wisdom* so she ate some and gave some to Adam who also ate.

Through the disobedience of Adam and Eve sin had entered the world. The effects of sin were immediately seen.

- Adam and Eve realised they were both naked and, in shame, sewed fig leaves for themselves as coverings.
- Adam and Eve hid from God and when God asked them why Adam tried to blame Eve and Eve blamed the serpent.
- God cursed the serpent so it would *eat dust* all the days of its life.
- God put enmity between the serpent and the woman, and between its offspring and hers. This is the first indication in the Bible that God was beginning the process of redemption that would culminate in people getting back to fellowship with Him, and that the power of sin would one day be broken. This was fulfilled at the Cross when the offspring of the serpent (satan) struck at Jesus resulting in His death. The good news is that Jesus then crushed the power of satan, by taking the punishment for sin that all people deserved and rising from the dead. When we receive Him as Saviour He forgives our sin and enables us to live free from sin’s power. Because of Jesus we can experience the kind of relationship with God that Adam and Eve had before the fall!
- Eve and all other woman would have great pain when bearing children.



- Adam and all other men would have to engage in *painful toil*, and would have to work hard to make a living. *By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food.*
- Ultimately all humans would die and *return to the ground*. The wages of sin is always death. Romans 6:23. This death is both physical (meaning that we all have a limited life span and will die one day), and spiritual (meaning that we are separated from God).
- People lost their innocence and became like God, *knowing good and evil*.
- God made clothes for Adam and Eve and banished them from the Garden of Eden.

The significance of Adam

Adam was the first man and the father of the human race. As such he is referred to many times throughout the Bible. e.g. Genesis 4:25; 5:1-5; 1 Chronicles 1:1; Hosea 6:7; Luke 3:38; Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:22,45; 1 Timothy 2:13-14; Jude 1:14.

The Hebrew word *adam* is not really a proper name; rather it means “man”, “mankind”, or “human beings”. This is how the word is used in verses like Leviticus 1:2; Joshua 14:15; Nehemiah 9:29; Isaiah 56:2; Exodus 4:11; Numbers 12:3; 16:29; Deuteronomy 4:28; 1 Kings 4:31; Job 7:20; 14:1; 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalms 11:4; 12:1; 14:2; 53:2; 90:3; Ecclesiastes 1:13; 2:3; Genesis 9:5-7; Deuteronomy 5:24; 8:3; 1 Kings 8:38-39; Psalms 8:4; 89:48; 107:8-31; Proverbs 12:14; Micah 6:8.

But Adam was more than just the first man. He represents the whole human race. In the ancient Hebrew mind-set individuals were less important than the social groups they belonged to. A representative could portray the qualities of the whole group. If the group was a family, the father was usually considered the representative of the whole family. e.g. Abraham is seen as the “father” of the Israelites, the Arabs and of all those who have faith in Jesus Christ. See Genesis 17:1-8 and compare with 20:1-9, 18; Exodus 20:5-6; Joshua 7:24-25; Romans 11:28; Hebrews 7:1-10.

Adam, then, was the father of mankind and represents the whole human race. In the New Testament Paul shows how Adam’s disobedience resulted in everyone having a sinful nature, and this has brought condemnation and death to all human beings. The good news is that through Jesus’ obedience (at the Cross) the power of this sinful nature is broken for those who are in Christ, and we can live a new life of righteousness. Human beings are thus either “in Adam” (and under condemnation due to their sinfulness), or “in Christ”, and righteous in God’s sight. To be “in Christ” is to be a new creation made in Jesus’ image, increasingly taking on the qualities of Jesus in our lives. See Romans Chapters 5-8, 12:5-8; 1 Corinthians 15:49; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:17-21; Galatians 3:26-28; 6:15). Ephesians 1:3-2:22; 4:20-24; Colossians 3:9-10.

At the Cross Jesus won back for us what Adam lost! Now we can have fellowship with God – in Christ Jesus.

Cain and Abel. Genesis 4:1-26.

Adam and Eve’s first children were Cain and Abel. *Abel kept flocks and Cain worked the soil*. When the boys brought offerings to the Lord Cain brought fruits and Abel brought fat portions from his animals. *The Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering* and this resulted in Cain being *very angry* and his face *downcast*. God saw this and asked why Cain was downcast when he would be accepted if he did what was right. *But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.*

Cain gave in to his sinful nature and in revenge killed Abel. When God asked where Abel was Cain replied with the selfish line *Am I my brother’s keeper?* The Lord knew what he had done and placed him under a curse. He would be a wanderer, but he would be protected by the *mark of Cain so that no-one who found him would kill him*. Cain then built a city in the land east of Eden and had a family. In this family we can see the beginnings of human culture and arts because they made tents, raised livestock, played musical instruments and forged tools out of bronze and iron.



Later Adam and Eve had another son, Seth, *in place of Abel*. This was the time when *people began to call on the name of the Lord*.

The sinful nature of Adam and Eve was clearly passed on to their children and is now part of our humanity. Every person on earth from that time on has struggled with this sinful nature. Its power can only be broken through the atonement made by Jesus on the Cross, and through our repentance, faith and obedience to Him, in the power of the Holy Spirit. See Romans Chapters 6,7,8 and Galatians 5:13-26.

From Adam to Noah. Genesis 5:1-32.

This chapter gives the genealogy from Adam to Noah. *When God created human beings, He created them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created He called them "human beings".* (The Hebrew word *Adam* means "man", "mankind", "human being").

Notable in these early people were:

- Enoch who *walked with God, then he was no more, because God took him away.* Enoch obviously had a very special relationship with God. God must have enjoyed his presence so much that He called him straight to heaven, so Enoch didn't die.
- Methuselah who was the oldest man recorded in the Bible. He lived for 969 years.
- Noah who *found favour in the eyes of the Lord.* Noah had three sons, Ham Shem and Japheth, after he was 500 years old. *Noah* means "relief" or "comfort".

Some consider that people lived a long time in these early days because the earth's atmosphere was still dense with clouds and mist as the earth cooled. Few harmful ultra-violet rays from the sun could get through to age people. During the rains that resulted in the flood this moisture was deposited on the earth's surface and the UV rays could then get through. After the flood the ages that people lived to became shorter and shorter, and today averages about 70. (Psalm 90:10).

The flood. Genesis 6:1-9:17.

As the population of people increased there was greater and greater sinfulness in the earth. *The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. God regretted that He had made human beings on the earth and decided to wipe from the face of the earth the human race that He had created along with all other living things. For I regret that I have made them.*

But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord. He was a righteous man who walked faithfully with God.

God told Noah He was going to destroy the earth but determined to save Noah and his family. He told Noah to build an ark and take all of the animals onto it, two by two, male and female, so that each species could be preserved. *Noah did all that the Lord commanded him.*

When the ark was ready, Noah and his sons Ham, Shem and Japheth and their wives and all the animals went aboard the ark. Seven days later the rains started and the floods came. *The rain fell on the earth for forty days and forty nights.* The highest mountains were covered, and life outside the ark perished. *The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days.*



Possible remains of Noah's ark on Mt Ararat, Turkey.

But God remembered Noah and sent a wind to evaporate the waters. Finally the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. Noah sent out a raven to see if the water had receded enough but it flew back and forth. Then he sent out a dove and it returned with an olive leaf in its mouth so Noah knew the water had receded enough. By the twenty seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry. Noah and his family and all the animals were then able to leave the ark. Noah made a sacrifice to the Lord, and the Lord promised that He would never again bring such destruction upon the earth. Never again will I curse the ground because of human beings, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.



God then blessed Noah and his sons so they increased in number and filled the earth. They could eat anything except meat that still had its blood in it. God repeated His promise that He would never again destroy the earth by a flood and gave the rainbow as a sign of this. Whenever we see a rainbow we remember that God has covenanted not to destroy all life on earth by means of a flood.

There has been much debate in religious and scientific circles about the flood. Some consider that it only affected the local region around the Tigris and Euphrates, rivers in Mesopotamia, and there is clear geological evidence of a major flood in this region. Others believe that the flood affected the whole earth, and a major flood is described in most ancient civilizations. 2 Peter 3:6.

Following the flood, God blessed Noah and his sons, Ham, Shem, and Japheth and made a covenant to never again send a worldwide flood. The rainbows we still see today are evidence that God has kept the promises He made in this covenant.

The establishment and spread of nations. Genesis 9:18-10:32.

From Noah's three sons Ham, Shem and Japheth came the *people who were scattered over the earth*.

Noah planted a vineyard and became drunk from wine he made and lay naked in his tent. Ham saw this and told his brothers who covered Noah up. As a result Ham and his son Canaan were cursed and would be a slave to his brothers, while Shem and Japheth were blessed.

Noah was 950 years old when he died, 350 years after the Flood. He is remembered as a man who *found favour in the eyes of the Lord* and who was righteous. Ezekiel 14:12-14,19-20. In the New Testament Noah is commended for his *faith, holy fear, and righteousness*, Hebrews 11:7 and for being a *preacher of righteousness*. 2 Peter 2:5.

Genesis Chapter 10 lists the descendants of Noah's three sons who re-populated the earth after the flood. *This is the history of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood*. The names of many of the tribes and nations of the world still reflect their origins as descendants of Noah's sons.

- The descendants of Ham are called the Hamites. They include the Canaanites (who lived in what was later to become Israel, the Promised Land); the Egyptians, the Cushites and the Libyans. Later Africa was populated by Hamites. Because many had black skin, this was associated with God's curse and used as a justification for slavery, based on Genesis 9:25: *Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers. May Canaan be the slave of Shem.*
- The descendants of Shem are often called Semites. They settled in what is today called the Middle East. Semitic nations include Assyrians, Babylonians, Phoenicians, Israelites, Samaritans, Arameans, Chaldeans, Amorites, Moabites, Edomites, Nabateans, Ethiopians and Arabs. These nations typically have similar languages. The term "anti-semitic" has come to refer to Jews only, rather than to all of the other semitic nations.
- The descendants of Japheth are called the Japhetic nations. They settled in Europe and include Scythians, Turks, Serbs, Croats, Armenians, Welsh, Picts, Irish, Germans, Slavs, Hungarians, Persians, Greeks, Georgians, Italics, Iberians, Basques, Russians, Thracians, Etruscans, Goths, Teutons and Jutes.

From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood. Broadly speaking, the descendants of Hamites spread to Africa; the descendants of Shem to the Middle East, and the descendants of Japheth to Europe.

The tower of Babel. Genesis 11:1-9.

At this stage in history *the whole world had one language and a common speech*. People settled in Shinar (Babylonia) and built a city (Babylon) and a *tower that reaches to the heavens*. They did this to make a name for themselves and so they wouldn't be *scattered over the face of the earth*. The Lord recognised that this was being done so they would be independent of His will and that with one language *nothing would be impossible for them*. He confused their language and this resulted in mankind *spreading all over the earth*. The word *babel* means "confused". The Tower of Babel is thought to have been sited at Birs Nimrud, not far from the ruins of the city of Babylon. It may have been a ziggurat, a tower associated with a temple.



Later Babylon became a major centre and was a consistent enemy of God's people, the Hebrews. The building of the Tower of Babel showed mankind's desire to be independent of God and the great confusion that always results when we leave God out of our lives. This spiritual confusion has continued in world systems through to this day, and will be finally destroyed at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. See Revelation 14:8.

From Shem to Abram. Genesis 11:10-26.

The family tree of Shem is listed, through to Terah, the father of Abram.

Abraham's early life. Genesis 11:27-14:24.

Abraham's name was originally Abram, meaning "exalted father." His father, Terah, was probably part of a moon cult in Ur, a city near the mouth of the Euphrates River. Abram married Sarai (meaning "contentious") but she was *barren*, and could have *no children*.

Terah took his family (including Abram and Sarai) to go to Canaan, *but when they came to Haran, in Assyria, they settled there.*



God then called Abram to go to Canaan and made him a wonderful promise: *"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."* So Abram left, as the Lord had told him.

Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran. He took his family, and all his possessions, and his brother Lot also went with them. Entering Canaan, Abram went first to Shechem, and God appeared to him at Moreh. They were obviously a little nervous because the Canaanites were living there, but God reassured them by repeating that He was giving the land to Abram and his offspring. Abram built an altar to the Lord at Shechem, then moved to Bethel and built another altar there. He *called on the name of the Lord* declaring his allegiance to the Lord in what was then a pagan land.

There was a famine in Canaan so Abram *went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was so severe.* He was concerned that the Egyptians might kill him to take his beautiful his wife Sarai so he said she was his sister. Sarai was taken to Pharaoh and Abram was treated well because the Egyptians thought he was Sarai's sister. In response *the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh's household.* Pharaoh summoned Abram and he confessed what he had done. Abram and his family were sent out of Egypt and headed back into the Negev, the southern part of Canaan. Truth always triumphs! Deception is never a good strategy.

Back in Canaan Abram became *very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold* and continued his nomadic way of life. The land could not support Abram and Lot's families so they decided to separate. Lot chose the plain of Jordan because it was *well watered, like a garden of the Lord* and went to the east. Abram took the land to the west and God reaffirmed his promise regarding this land: *All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring for ever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.* Abram finally settled at Hebron, close to modern day Jerusalem.



Lot settled in Sodom, but was captured when a group of local kings overtook Sodom and Gomorrah. When Abram heard that this had happened he gathered a group of soldiers and went to rescue Lot. He *brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.* When Abram returned home after defeating the local kings he was met by Melchizedek, king of Salem (now called Jerusalem). Melchizedek was also a priest and he blessed Abram. In return Abram gave him a tenth of the spoils of war that he had captured. He didn't keep the rest but, grateful for God's mercies, gave away all that he had gained except for what his men had eaten and the share that belonged to those who supported him. This incident is interpreted in Hebrews Chapter 7 and 8 where Jesus is shown to be a High Priest like Melchizedek. But Jesus' priesthood in the New Covenant is "better" than that of the priests under the Old Covenant. Abram gave a tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedek; *a priest like the Son of God.* Now the former regulations are *set aside* and Jesus introduces a *better hope* because He lives forever and has a permanent priesthood.

God's covenant with Abram. Genesis 15:1-21

Abram was concerned that he had no children and that Eliezer, his servant would become his heir. (The custom of the day was that if a couple were childless they could adopt a servant to be their heir, and receive their inheritance. Then if a son was born naturally he would replace the servant as the heir). God encouraged Abram by explaining more clearly how He would fulfil His promise that he would bring blessing to all peoples.

God said that *a son coming from your body will be your heir*. God showed Abram the heavens and said that as the stars *so shall your offspring be*.

And Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness.

Abram wanted to know how he could take possession of the land God had given him. God showed him in a dream that his descendants will live in the land, *be enslaved and ill-treated for four hundred years*; and then return to their land. (This was fulfilled when the children of Israel were taken into captivity in Egypt for 400 years and were then brought back to the Promised Land by Moses).

The birth of Ishmael. Genesis 16:1-16.

Abram and Sarai still had no children!

Sarai desperately wanted a child and gave Abram the opportunity to start a family with her servant Hagar. Unfortunately Abram agreed and Ishmael was born. Ishmael means *God hears* indicating that the Lord had heard Sarai's misery. When Hagar found she was pregnant she despised Sarai and Sarai retaliated by mistreating her. As a result Hagar fled into the desert. The Lord told her to go back and submit to her mistress and that he would give her descendants too numerous to count. Ishmael became the father of the Arab peoples who would *live in hostility towards all his brothers*, a situation that continues to this day. *Abram was eighty six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael*. How different would history have been if Abram had continued to believe God, rather than trying to sort out his destiny in his own strength!

The covenant of circumcision. Genesis 17:1-27.

When Abram was 99, the Lord appeared to him and reaffirmed His promise that he would have a son. *I am God Almighty (El Shaddai); walk before Me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between Me and you and will greatly increase your numbers*. God then gave more details of His covenant with Abram:

- He would be *the father of many nations*. In recognition of this God changed his name from Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of many).
- He would be *very fruitful*. Nations and kings would come from him.
- The covenant would be an *everlasting covenant* between God and Abraham's descendants.
- He would be given the *whole land of Canaan* as an *everlasting possession* to him and his descendants.
- God would be their God.



The sign of this covenant would be that *every male among you shall be circumcised*. Anyone who would not be circumcised would break the covenant and be *cut off* from its blessings.

God also changed the name of Sarai (contentious) to Sarah (Princess) and indicated that she would be *the mother of nations*. Abraham laughed at this because Sarah was 90 years old. But God said that Sarah would indeed bear a son and Abraham was to call him Isaac (meaning he laughs). The covenant would be established through Isaac, but Ishmael would also be blessed and become a *great nation*.

In obedience Abraham circumcised Ishmael and all males in his household and then waited for God to fulfil His promises.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 18:1-19:38.

The Lord appeared to Abraham near Mamre as he sat in front of his tent on a hot day and reaffirmed His promise to Abraham. Three *men* (possibly angels) then came to Abraham seeking water and rest.

Abraham offered them hospitality and the Lord repeated His promise that Abraham and Sarah would have a child, this time saying that it would *be about this time next year*. Sarah overheard this and burst out laughing because they were *old and well advanced in years* and she was *past the age of childbearing*. The Lord asked why Sarah laughed and said that nothing was too hard for Him. He would return to them *at the appointed time next year* and *Sarah will have a son*.

The three men were on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah, two evil cities. God decided to tell Abraham what He was about to do because He had such a special relationship with Abraham. *Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just; so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.*

God said He was going to judge Sodom and Gomorrah for their evil ways. Abraham pleaded that God would not do this because there must be some righteous people in the cities, and it would not be right to judge them. *Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?* God relented for the sake of 50 righteous people. Abraham then pleaded for 45, then 40, then 30, then 20, then 10. This shows how God listens to our prayers, and how we can be bold in asking Him for things that are aligned with God's nature, in this case, His justice.

In due course, two angels went to Sodom and met Lot at the gate of the city. Lot invited them to stay at his house and the men of Sodom gathered calling for the men to come outside so they could *have sex with them*. Lot was frightened and offered his daughters instead. When the evil Sodomites tried to storm the house the angels struck them blind, and Lot and his family fled from the city. The angels said that *the outcry to the Lord against its people is so great that He has sent us to destroy it.*

Lot didn't want to go into the mountains and was allowed to go to the small town of Zoar and there his life would *be spared*. Then *the Lord rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah and overthrew those cities*. Lot's wife looked back (when told not to) and was turned into a pillar of salt. Next morning Abraham saw how God had *destroyed the cities of the plain*, but had honoured His promise not to judge everyone who lived there, by bringing Lot *out of the catastrophe*.

The evidence of these monumental events can still be seen today in the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the pillar of salt that was Lot's wife.

Lot was afraid to stay in Zoar and lived in the mountains with his two daughters. The two daughters wanted to preserve their family line and so got their father drunk and lay with him. *So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father*. The children of the older daughter became the Moabites, and the children of the younger daughter became the Ammonites. They settled to the east in modern day Jordan and have been enemies of the Israelites from that time on.

Abraham and Abimelech. Genesis 20:1-17.

Abraham moved on and lived for a while in Gerar. Again he tried to deceive by saying Sarah was his sister. Abimelech, the king of Gerar, tried to take Sarah but God told him that she was married and he returned her to Abraham. Next morning Abimelech called Abraham in asking *How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should not be done*. Abraham explained that he had done it out of fear and that Sarah was actually his sister, as well as his wife. Abimelech forgave Abraham and Sarah and allowed them to go *wherever you like* in his land. He gave them money and *completely vindicated* them. *Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again, for the Lord had closed up every womb in Abimelech's household because of Abraham's wife Sarah*. Abraham may have been a man of great faith, but he was also a man who was affected by fears, and who tried to do things in his own strength, apart from God. Most Christians are a bit like this!

Later, Abimelech asked for Abraham to make a treaty with him because he recognized that *God was with him* in everything he did. The treaty was sealed with an oath made beside a well. The place was called Beersheba (meaning *well of the oath*).



The birth of Isaac. Genesis 21:1-34.

God then fulfilled His promise to Abraham and Sarah. *The Lord did for Sarah what He had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave him the name Isaac meaning he laughs. Sarah said God has brought me laughter! All who hear about this will laugh with me.* This was when Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90! Nothing is too hard for the Lord!

Isaac was circumcised when he was 8 days old. Later, Abraham held a feast to celebrate Isaac's weaning and Sarah noticed that Ishmael was mocking Isaac. She wanted Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away so Ishmael would never share in the inheritance with Isaac. Abraham was distressed by this but God re-assured him by saying that a great nation would come through Isaac (the nation of Israel), but another great nation would also come through Ishmael (the Arab nations).

Hagar and Ishmael were sent away and they lived in the desert. *God was with Ishmael as he grew up.*

Abraham's faith is tested. Genesis 22:1-24.

God then *tested Abraham* by commanding him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, as a *burnt offering* on Mt Moriah. Abraham had waited 25 years for God to fulfil His promise, and now he was being asked to sacrifice the one who was his heir, and through whom would come a mighty nation. But Abraham realized what it would mean if he did not obey God so he prepared for the sacrifice in obedience to the Lord. When Isaac asked *Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?* Abraham replied that *God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.* (Which He did when He provided Jesus, His Son, as the Lamb of God that would take away the sin of the world. John 1:29).

Just as Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac an angel stopped him by calling out *Abraham!* God saw that Abraham truly feared God because he had not *withheld even your beloved son from me*. Abraham noticed a ram caught in a nearby thicket and used that for the sacrifice instead of Isaac. Abraham named the area where this took place *the Lord will provide*, which is on the Temple Mount in modern day Jerusalem. So Abraham passed the test by showing that he absolutely trusted in the Lord. As a result God restated His promise that Abraham's descendants would be *as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore* and that all nations on the earth would be blessed because Abraham had obeyed Him.



The death of Sarah. Genesis 23:1-20.

Sarah died at the age of 127 and Abraham purchased a field from the Hittites as a burial ground. The Hittites held in him in such high regard that they wanted to give the field to him, but Abraham insisted on paying for it. Sarah was buried in a cave of Machpelah in the field.

The marriage of Isaac and Rebekah. Genesis 24:1-67.

Abraham was now old and advanced in years, and the Lord had blessed him in every way. He wanted Isaac to *get a wife* from his own people and not *one of the daughters of the Canaanites*. It was the custom for parents to arrange marriages for their children so Abraham sent his chief servant to Nahor in Mesopotamia to find a bride for Isaac from among his relatives. The servant asked what would happen if the woman he chose wouldn't come back to Canaan, and Abraham restated God's promise that he would inherit the land of Canaan. Any woman who was unwilling to come couldn't be Isaac's wife. The servant went to Nahor and asked the Lord to give him success and be kind to his master, Abraham. The servant met Rebekah as she was getting water and asked her for some. She gave him a drink and some water for his animals as well. Rebekah was *very beautiful, and a virgin*. The servant offered money so he could stay at her house and found that Rebekah was *the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milcah bore to Nahor*. She was from Abraham's family! The servant went to their house and was welcomed by Rebekah's brother, Laban. He explained why he had come and recognised that God had led him *on the right road to get the grand-daughter of my master's brother for his son*. Laban and Bethuel also recognised *this was from the Lord* and said that *Rebekah could become the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has directed*. When Abraham's servant heard this he thanked God and gave them gifts. Next morning they asked Rebekah whether she was willing to go with the servant to marry Isaac and she said *"I will go"*. The party set off for Canaan and Isaac, who was living in the Negev saw them approaching. Isaac asked who the woman was

and the servant explained what had happened. Isaac brought Rebekah into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married her. *So she became his wife, and he loved her, and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.*

This romantic story shows us the importance of faith, obedience and perseverance if we are to fulfil God's purposes for our lives, and experience God's blessing.

The death of Abraham. Genesis 25:1-11.

Later Abraham took another wife, Keturah, and she bore him many sons. Abraham left everything to Isaac and gave gifts to the other sons and sent them away to the east.

Abraham lived to be 175 years old and died *at a good old age* and was buried with Sarah in the cave of Machpelah.

Abraham was a man who believed and trusted God

Abraham is acknowledged as the father of the Israelites (through Isaac), and the father of the Arabs (through Ishmael). He is also described as the *friend of God* (2 Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23) which shows that he had a very special personal relationship with God. Out of this relationship came God's promise that *all the families of the earth will be blessed* through him. (Genesis 12:3).

Even though Abraham's faith was sorely tested at times he trusted God to the end and all the promises that God made to him were fulfilled. Abraham is now recognized as not just the father of the Israelites and the Arabs. He is *the father of all who believe*. (Romans 4:11). His descendants are all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and so are saved. Their number is indeed *as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore and all nations on the earth* are indeed *blessed* because Abraham trusted God.

The sons of Ishmael. Genesis 25:12-18.

Ishmael lived to the age of 137. He had many sons and they *lived in hostility towards all their brothers*. This hostility seems to have continued to this day between the various Arab nations.

Jacob and Esau. Genesis 25:19-34.

Isaac's wife Rebekah was unable to have children so he prayed for her and she became pregnant with twins. The babies *jostled each other within her* and when she asked why the Lord explained that the twins would become two nations who would be separated from each other. The younger one would be stronger and the older would *serve the younger*. The first baby to be born was hairy and red. He was named "Esau," which sounds like a Hebrew word for "hair". Esau's other name was Edom, meaning "red". The second baby to be born was grasping at his brother's heel. He was called "Jacob" which means "grasps the heel" indicating that he was a "deceiver" or one who attacks from the rear. The two boys were very different from each other. Esau was a *skilful hunter, a man of the open country* while Jacob was *a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.*

One day Jacob prepared a red-coloured stew and Esau came in feeling very hungry. Esau *despised his birthright* and sold it for some of the stew. This enabled the prophesy given at his birth to be fulfilled: *the older shall serve the younger.*

Isaac and Abimelech. Genesis 26:1-35.

There was a famine in the land and Isaac considered going to Egypt but God told him to stay in Palestine. There he would enjoy great prosperity and blessing because Abraham, his father, had obeyed the Lord and kept his requirements. Isaac went to Abimelech, the king of the Philistines and stayed there for a while. Rebekah was *beautiful* and when the men of the area asked about her Isaac became fearful and lied saying she was his sister. (Just as Abraham had done with his wife Sarah). When the lie was discovered, Abimelech rebuked Isaac and forbade anyone to interfere with him or his family. Isaac prospered greatly, so much so that Abimelech finally

This episode in Isaac's life clearly demonstrates how obedience to the Lord and following of God's ways can result in great blessing on our lives. Isaac could have gone down to Egypt which was the logical thing to do. Instead he heard God's voice and obeyed what the Lord said he should do. God honoured His promises and blessed Isaac and his family. The blessing was obvious to all and was a great testimony to the faithfulness of the Lord.

asked him to leave the area. Isaac moved to Beersheba, where he opened up old wells and found plenty of water so he could *flourish in the land*. God had prospered Isaac and Abimelech recognised this and sought for a treaty so that they *would do us no harm*.

Isaac as a type of Christ

There are many parallels in the lives of Isaac and Jesus Christ. This has led some scholars to consider Isaac as a 'type' or 'fore-shadowing' of Christ.

Here are some of these parallels:

- Isaac was born in fulfilment of God's promise. So was Jesus. Genesis 17:15-21; 21:8-13. Matthew 1:21, Isaiah 9:6,7.
- Isaac had a miraculous birth. His father Abraham was 99 and his mother Sarah was 90 when Isaac was born. Jesus also had a miraculous birth. He was born of the virgin Mary and conceived by the Holy Spirit. Genesis 18:9-14, Luke 1:26-38, Isaiah 7:14.
- Isaac was loved by his father, Abraham. Jesus was (and is) loved by the Father. Genesis 22:2, Matthew 3:17.
- Isaac was placed on the altar as a sacrifice. Isaac was set free and a ram sacrificed in his place. Jesus was the Lamb of God who was sacrificed on the cross to make atonement for the sins of all. Genesis 22:1-18, John 1:29. Romans 5:8, 1 John 4:10, John 3:16, Hebrews 9:14,15.
- Abraham sent a servant to find Isaac a bride. The Father has sent the Holy Spirit to create a bride for Christ. This bride is the Church. Genesis 24. John 15::26, 16:7,8,13.
 - Isaac's bride had to be from the father's own people. Genesis 24:3,4. The Bride of Christ is made up of God's people. Revelation 19:6-9.
 - The servant brought gifts to the bride, Rebekah. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to the Church. Genesis 24:2,10. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.
 - Rebekah was beautiful. Jesus sees His Church as beautiful. Genesis 24:15,16. Revelation 19:8.
 - Rebekah was willing to marry Isaac. The Church will one day be ready to marry Jesus. Genesis 24:50-58. Revelation 19:7.
 - There was a wonderful celebration when Isaac and Rebekah married. There will also be a great celebration at the marriage supper of the Lamb when Jesus marries His bride, the Church. Genesis 24:62-67. 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17. Revelation 19:7-9.

Isaac is mentioned a number of times in the New Testament. See Acts 7:8, Romans 9:7, Galatians 4:21-31, and Hebrews 11:9-20.

Isaac blesses Jacob and not Esau. Genesis 27:1-28:9.

Esau was Isaac's favourite son but caused grief to his parents by marrying two Hittite women. When Isaac was old he wanted to give his oldest son a blessing. This was the tradition of the time and the blessing was legally binding, even though given orally. Rebekah overheard Isaac telling Esau to *hunt some wild game* in preparation for the blessing and encouraged Jacob to deceive the blind old man by covering himself in animal skins so he felt and smelled like Esau. (Jacob's name means *deceiver*). The deception succeeded, and Isaac gave the blessing to Jacob, his younger son.

The blessing was that God would bless Jacob with *abundance* and that *nations would serve him; peoples would bow down to him* including his brothers and that *those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed*. This meant that the blessing given to Abraham was passed on to Isaac and then on to Jacob (also called *Israel*). It also meant that Jacob had deceived Esau two times: *He took my birthright and now he's taken my blessing*.

When Esau came to receive his blessing he found that he was too late and only received a minor blessing. Esau would not inherit the *earth's richness*; rather he would *live by the sword* and would *serve his brother*. Later he would escape from this bondage to his brother. Esau was very bitter against Jacob because of this and Rebekah sent Jacob away to her brother Laban in Mesopotamia to escape Esau's anger and obtain a wife. Jacob became the patriarch of the Israelites and Esau married one of Ishmael's daughters and became the patriarch of the Edomites, settling east of the Dead Sea in modern day Jordan. There has been ongoing bitterness between the nations descended from Jacob and Esau; a situation that continues to this day. See Malachi 1:2-5; Obadiah 1-21.



Jacob's dream. Genesis 28:10-22.

Jacob left for Haran in Mesopotamia and God appeared to him in a dream when he stopped on the way. He saw a stairway which reached up from earth to heaven and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. God appeared and renewed with Jacob the promise made to Abraham and Isaac. He would have many descendants and God would give him and these descendants the land on which he was lying, and *all peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring*. God would be with him and would watch over him *wherever you go* and would bring him back to the land (of Canaan). Jacob recognised that this place was a *house of God* and named it *Bethel* (meaning "house of God").

Jacob set up a stone as a *pillar* in God's house and gave God a tenth of all he had in recognition of His goodness.



Jacob in Haran. Genesis 29:1-30:43.

When Jacob reached Haran he looked for his uncle Laban. He met Rachel, Laban's younger daughter, a shepherdess, and realised that he had found his relatives; his *flesh and blood*. Jacob then stayed with Laban for a month. He fell in love with Rachel and agreed to work for Laban for seven years so he could marry her. After the seven years Laban threw a party and deceived Jacob by giving him his older daughter Leah as a wife. Jacob then had to work another seven years for Rachel. *Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah.*

God blessed Jacob in Haran and his family and his flocks increased rapidly in number. He had on-going problems with Laban and told him that he wanted to return to his homeland in Canaan. Laban wanted him to stay and offered him wages of all spotted or speckled sheep and goats from his flocks. Cunningly Jacob provided shelter near their watering troughs where all of the flocks gathered and mated, leading to many spotted and speckled offspring. He made sure that the offspring of the strong animals were his and the weak ones were Laban's. In this way Jacob grew *exceedingly prosperous*.

Jacob leaves Haran. Genesis 31:1-55.

Jacob noticed that Laban's attitude toward him had hardened because he had prospered and *the God of his father was with him*. The Lord then said Jacob should return to Canaan *the land of your fathers and your relatives, and I will be with you*. He fled from Laban, leaving secretly with his wives, children, and all of his livestock. Rachel stole her father's household gods so when Laban found this out he pursued them and caught up with Jacob in the hill country of Gilead. (According to the local custom possession of these "gods" made the holder heir to the owner's estate). Jacob didn't know Rachel had stolen the gods and allowed Laban to search for them, but Rachel had hidden them. Laban described how Jacob had taken so much of his family and flocks, and Jacob described how Laban had treated him unjustly for many years. A typical relationship breakdown! In the end they made a covenant not to harm each other further, sealing this with a pillar of rocks called Galeed, meaning *witness heap*, or Mizpah, meaning *watchtower*. Jacob took an oath there in the fear of the Lord, and then Laban returned home to Haran.

Jacob meets Esau. Genesis 32:1-33:20.

As he got closer to Canaan Jacob became nervous about meeting his brother, Esau, who he had deceived. He sent messengers to Esau saying he was coming home, that he had many flocks, and asking that he might find favour in Esau's eyes. When the messengers returned they reported that Esau was coming out to meet him with 400 men. *In great fear and distress* Jacob divided his camp into two groups hoping that one might escape if they were attacked. Jacob then prayed to the Lord for his safety, reminding God that He had promised to prosper him and *make his descendants like the sand of the sea which cannot be counted*. He also selected a gift of many of his best animals and sent them on, hoping to pacify Esau. That night Jacob was left alone, and a *man* (apparently an angel representing God) wrestled with him throughout the night. Toward dawn the man touched Jacob's thigh, and his hip was dislocated. But Jacob would not give up until the man blessed him. The Lord then changed Jacob's name to Israel, meaning "he struggles with God." Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning "face of God", because he had *seen God face to face* and yet his life was spared.

When he met Esau Jacob gathered his family and then went forward, bowing low before his brother. To Jacob's surprise, Esau *ran to Jacob and embraced him* and the meeting was a happy one. Jacob offered his gifts but Esau said he *already had plenty*. Jacob insisted because *God has been gracious to me and I have all I need*. Esau returned to Seir and Jacob moved on to Succoth, meaning "shelters", and then to Shechem, where he bought a piece of land from Hamor, the father of Shechem. Jacob built an altar there and called it El-Elohe-Israel, or "God, the God of Israel". Jacob had returned home to Canaan and to his Lord.



Jacob's revenge on Shechem. Genesis 34:1-31.

Shechem raped Jacob's daughter Dinah, but his heart was drawn to her and *he loved the girl*. Jacob was filled with grief and fury because Shechem had done a *disgraceful thing*. Shechem's father Hamor asked Jacob if the two could marry. He offered to pay a suitable price, and let Jacob live and trade in the land. Jacob's sons acted deceitfully by saying they would only consent if all the males in the area agreed to be circumcised. They agreed, believing that Jacob's family was friendly toward them. Every male in the city was circumcised. Three days later, while they were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons attacked and killed all of the males in Hamor's family, including Shechem, and took their wives and children and plundered their belongings and animals. Jacob was not happy with this, recognising that it made his name a *stench* to the Canaanites. Revenge is never a good policy!

Deception in Jacob's life

Jacob's original name meant *deceiver* and he had a deceptive nature which showed out many times in his life.

- He deceived his blind father Isaac into giving him the inheritance that was due to his older brother Esau.
- He was deceived by his uncle Laban when he worked for seven years to marry Rachel, but was tricked into marrying Leah.
- He deceived Laban by selectively breeding from his flocks and taking the most fertile and strongest offspring.
- He was deceived by his wife Rachel when she stole Laban's gods and hid them from him.
- Two of his sons deceived Hamor into having all males in his family circumcised and then attacked and killed them. This brought disgrace upon Jacob's name.
- He was deceived by his older sons when they sold his favourite son Joseph as a slave and told him that he had been killed.
- He was deceived by Joseph when there was a famine and his whole family had to come begging for food.

Later, God changed Jacob's name to Israel, meaning *he struggles with God*.

Jacob had a long and difficult life but his final years were happy and he is remembered mostly for the dynasty he established through his sons – the children of Israel.

We can learn a lot from Jacob's life. If we are deceptive or struggle with God we will experience the consequences in our lives. If we are honest and co-operate with God we are much more likely to know God's blessing on what we do. Jacob may have been deceitful, but because the Lord worked in his life, he still has an honourable place in the history of the Jewish people. God can work in and through anyone!

Jacob returns to Bethel. Genesis 35: 1-15.

God told Jacob to settle in Bethel. This was the place where he had wrestled with God. Genesis 28:10-22. Jacob got rid of all the *foreign gods* he had with him and built a new altar there because he recognised God *has been with me wherever I have gone*. The altar was named El Bethel, meaning "God of Bethel". God appeared to Jacob and blessed him there, renaming him *Israel*, meaning "he struggles with God". This recognised all of the struggles that Jacob had, and how he still tried to do what the Lord wanted of him. God re-stated the promise that He had made: that Israel would be fruitful and that nations would come

from him. God would also give the land to him and his descendants, as He had promised to Abraham and Isaac. God called Himself El Shaddai as He said this. El Shaddai means “God, the Almighty”.

Rachel and Isaac’s death. Genesis 35:16-29.

Rachel died as she gave birth to her last son, Benjamin (meaning “son of my right hand”). She was buried in Ephrath (or Bethlehem). Isaac lived to the ripe old age of 180. *Then he breathed his last and was gathered to his people, old and full of years.* He was buried by both of his sons, Esau and Jacob.

Jacob’s sons

Jacob had twelve sons. They are often called the *children of Israel* because God changed Jacob’s name from Jacob, meaning *he grasps the heel or he deceives*, to Israel, meaning *he struggles with God*. Genesis 32:28, 33:10. From these sons came the twelve tribes of Israel.

Children born to Leah when the Lord saw that Leah was *not loved* and *opened her womb*.

- **Reuben**, meaning *misery* was named because Leah believed God had seen her misery.
- **Simeon**, meaning *one who hears* was named because Leah believed God had heard she was not loved.
- **Levi**, meaning *attached*, was named because Leah hoped Jacob would become attached to her.
- **Judah**, meaning *praise* was named because this time, Leah praised the Lord.

Children born to Bilhah, Rachel’s servant because Rachel was barren and was jealous of Leah. She wanted children so she used her servant Bilhah to get them.

- **Dan**, meaning *vindication* was named because Rachel saw Dan’s birth as being a vindication from God!
- **Naphthali**, meaning *struggle* was named to reflect the struggles Rachel had with Leah.

Children born to Zilpah, Leah’s servant after Leah could not have children of her own.

- **Gad**, meaning *good fortune*, named because Leah thought it was good fortune to have a child through her servant.
- **Asher**, meaning *happy*, named because Leah was happy to have another son.

Children born to Leah after she became fertile again.

- **Issachar**, meaning *reward*, because Leah thought God had rewarded her for giving her servant to Jacob.
- **Zebulun**, meaning *honour*, because Leah hoped Jacob would treat her with honour.

Children born to Rachel after the Lord *opened her womb*.

- **Joseph**, meaning *may he add*, as Rachel thought God had taken away her disgrace and added to her a son.
- **Benjamin**, meaning *son of my right hand*. Benjamin was born after Jacob returned to Bethel. Rachel had great difficulty in childbirth and died as he was being born. She wanted to name the child Ben-oni meaning *son of my trouble*, but Jacob named him Benjamin.

Esau’s descendants. Genesis 36:1-43.

This chapter lists the genealogy of Esau, Jacob’s older brother. Esau is also called Edom and was *the father of the Edomites*. Esau *took his wives from the women of Canaan*. They settled *in the hill country of Seir* (in modern-day Jordan). The Israelites and the Edomites have been enemies right throughout history; a situation that still continues today.

In the rest of Genesis we learn about Joseph, Jacob’s eleventh son (and his favourite!).

Joseph’s dreams. Genesis 37:1-11.

Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons and made him a *richly ornamented robe*. As a result of this favouritism the other brothers hated Joseph and *could not speak a kind word to him*.

The name Joseph means, “The Lord will add”. It was a very common name in biblical times. There are many different Josephs mentioned in the Bible, but Jacob’s 11th son stands out as someone who faced many difficult circumstances but who remained true to God and generous to other people. As a result, God made him extremely successful and used him to save the whole Hebrew race.

Joseph had a dream in which they were all binding sheaves of corn and his rose up and all the others bowed down to it. Then he had another dream in which the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to him. Unwisely he told his brothers and his parents about these dreams. *His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in his mind.*



Joseph sold by his brothers. Genesis 37:12-36.

One day Jacob sent Joseph to the brothers while they were looking after their flocks near Shechem. When the brothers saw him they *plotted to kill him*. Reuben persuaded them to throw him into a cistern and then to sell him to some Midianites on their way to Egypt. They dipped Joseph's "amazing technicolour dreamcoat" in goat's blood and took it back to Jacob. Jacob thought Joseph had been *torn to pieces* by some animal and mourned for his son. *Meanwhile the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.*

Judah and Tamar. Genesis 38:1-30.

This chapter is a brief side-track from Joseph's story. It describes an unfortunate episode in the life of Judah, Jacob's fourth son.

Judah married a Canaanite (in direct disobedience to the command of the Lord) and had three sons with her: Er, Onan and Shelah. Judah got a wife for Er called Tamar. Er was wicked so *the Lord put him to death*. This meant that Tamar still had no husband so Judah asked Onan to *produce offspring* for his brother, but he *spilled his semen* on the ground. This was also wicked in the Lord's sight and Onan died. Judah then invited Tamar to live with him until Shelah was old enough to marry her, but prevented them from marrying. When Judah's wife died, Tamar dressed as a prostitute and Judah slept with her, *not realising she was his daughter in law*. Tamar asked for a pledge and Judah gave her his cord and staff. When Judah tried to get the pledge back he realised that Tamar wasn't a prostitute and found that she was pregnant with twins. He tried to have her burned to death but she then told him that he was the twin's father, proving it by the cord and staff. When the time came for the twins to be born Zerah put out his hand and the midwife tied a scarlet thread on it. This baby went back into the womb and his brother Perez was born first, followed by Zerah, with his scarlet thread.

Judah is important because he is the one of ancestors of Jesus, as listed in Matthew and Luke's genealogies (Matthew 1:3, Luke 3:33).

Judah was specially blessed by Jacob as being in the "royal line" – family from which Messiah would come. *The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until He comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is His.* Genesis 49:10.

Judah's sin with Tamar resulted in the child Perez being born out of wedlock. This meant nine generations were under a curse. Deuteronomy 23:2. As a result, when the time came for the Israelites to choose a king, Saul was chosen from the line of Benjamin, not Judah. 1 Samuel 9 and 10. The nine generations are listed in Ruth 4:18-22 and they show that David was the 10th generation after Judah. When Samuel came to anoint a new king for Israel he anointed David as king, even though Saul was the King! 1 Samuel 16:13.

David was the tenth generation after Judah and thus free of the curse. This meant the line could revert back to Judah, and Jesus could be from the house and line of David. Luke 2:4, 2 Samuel 7:12,13, Acts 2:30.

Joseph in Egypt. Genesis 39:1 - 41:57.

In Egypt, Joseph was bought by Potiphar, an Egyptian who was *one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard*. *The Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in everything he did*. Potiphar eventually put Joseph *in charge of his household* and the *Lord blessed Potiphar because of Joseph*. Joseph was *well built and handsome* and Potiphar's wife was attracted to him and tried to seduce him. Joseph resisted her advances, recognising that they were a sin against his master and against God. One day Potiphar's wife grabbed Joseph's cloak tried to get him to go to bed with her. Joseph ran away but left his coat behind. Potiphar's wife accused Joseph of attempting to rape her showing the cloak as evidence. Potiphar believed her and Joseph was put in prison, along with Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. Once again the Lord was with Joseph and he was looked on favourably by the warder and put in charge of all those who were held in the prison. The cup-bearer and baker both had dreams which Joseph was able to interpret because

interpretations belong to God. Just as Joseph had predicted, the baker was executed and the cupbearer restored to the King's favour.

Two years later Pharaoh also had some dreams and his magicians and wise men could not interpret them. The cupbearer remembered that Joseph could interpret dreams and summoned him to Pharaoh. Joseph explained that it was God who would give Pharaoh the explanation he desired. God then revealed to Joseph that the dreams meant there would be seven years of abundance in Egypt, followed by seven years of great famine and that God would bring this about *soon*. Pharaoh was impressed with Joseph's interpretation and made him ruler of Egypt, second only to himself. Joseph was charged with collecting and storing food during the seven good years so there would be enough during the famine.

Joseph was 30 years old when this happened. Before the famine came Joseph had two sons Manasseh (meaning "forget" because God had made him *forget all the troubles of his father's household*) and Ephraim (meaning "twice fruitful" because God had made him fruitful in the *land of his suffering*). These sons later produced two half tribes.

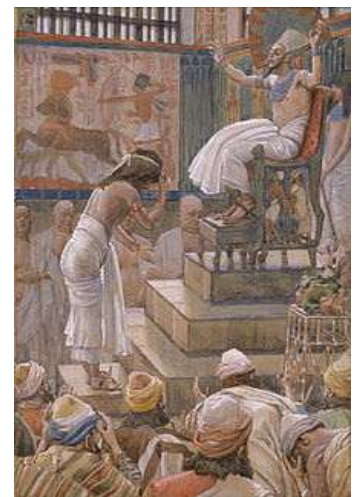
The seven years of abundance were followed by seven years of famine just as Joseph had predicted. *There was famine in all the lands, but in Egypt there was food.* People from other countries came to Egypt to buy grain because *the famine was severe in all the world.*

Joseph reunited with his family. Genesis 42:1-47:12.

Back in Palestine, the famine was severe so Jacob sent all of his sons, except Benjamin, to Egypt to buy grain *so that we may live and not die*. When the brothers appeared before Joseph they did not recognize him and bowed down and asked him for grain. This fulfilled the dream Joseph had received years before. (Genesis 42:8-9). After listening to the report of their family, Joseph accused them of being spies and, to prove their truthfulness, made them leave one of their brothers as a hostage and return with Benjamin. The brothers thought they were being punished because of the way they had treated their brother years before. Simeon, the oldest brother, was bound and left in Egypt while the other brothers went back to get Benjamin. They were given grain and provisions for the journey but Joseph also hid their silver payment in their packs. When they got back to Palestine they discovered the silver in their packs and told Jacob what had happened. Jacob was very distressed because he thought he had now lost two of his sons and everything *is against me!*

When the famine got much worse Jacob asked his sons to go back to Egypt to buy more grain and agreed to Joseph's conditions. This time Benjamin went with them and Judah guaranteed his safety. They took some special gifts for Joseph and doubled the amount of silver that had been returned to them. When they arrived in Egypt they were taken to Joseph's steward and offered their silver as payment for the grain on the last journey. Joseph's steward said it was not necessary because God had provided the silver in payment. They were taken to Joseph's house and reunited with Simeon. Joseph put on a meal for them and seated them in order of their birth, barely controlling his emotions as he heard about his father. Meanwhile Joseph ordered his servants to fill their sacks with food and replace their silver as before. He also had his silver cup placed in Benjamin's sack.

As they returned home the steward chased them asking why that had *repaid good with evil* by stealing the cup from Joseph. They said they had done no such thing and that if anyone had done it they deserved to die. The cup was found in Benjamin's sack and the brothers went back to Joseph pleading for his life, and saying how important Benjamin was to their father Jacob. Finally Joseph *could no longer control himself* and disclosed to them who he was and explained that God had sent him *ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance*. Joseph then made arrangements for Jacob to come to him and provided provisions for the journey. When Jacob arrived in Egypt, Joseph went out to meet him, and another emotional reunion took place. Joseph presented his father and brothers to



Pharaoh, who found they were shepherds and allowed the whole family to settle in the land of Goshen, *the best part of the land*. Jacob was 130 years old at this time.

The names of the 66 people who went to Egypt are listed in Genesis 46:8-25, Together with Joseph's family already in Egypt. This meant that the *members of Jacob's family were seventy in all*.

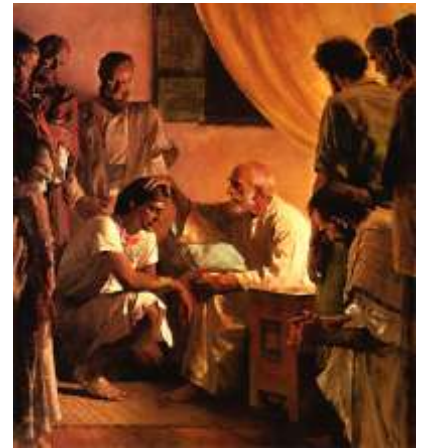
Famine in Egypt. Genesis 47:13-31.

During the famine Joseph sold stored grain for livestock and livestock for land. So Joseph *bought all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh*, and this *reduced the people to servitude*. He gave them seed but they were required to give back 1/5 to Pharaoh. Because the Israelites settled in the fertile land of Goshen they prospered and *increased greatly in number*.

Jacob lived in Egypt for 17 of his 147 years. When he knew he was going to die he asked Joseph to bury him back in Canaan with his ancestors, and Joseph agreed.

Blessing the next generation. Genesis 48:1-49:28.

When he learned that Jacob was very ill Joseph took his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to him so they could receive his blessing. Jacob's *eyes were failing* and he crossed his hands and gave Ephraim the greater blessing rather than the older son, Manasseh. Joseph tried to stop him doing this but Jacob said the *younger would be greater than the older*, but that both would be *become a group of nations* – the half tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.



Jacob then called for all of his sons and blessed them individually, prophesying what would happen to them *in the days to come*.

- **Reuben** would no longer excel because he defiled his father.
- **Simeon** and **Levi** would be scattered because of their violence.
- **Judah** would be honoured above the other brothers. The “royal line” would come through Judah fulfilled by Jesus Christ, the lion of the Tribe of Judah. Zechariah 10:4, Hebrews 7:14; Revelation 5:5. *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between His feet, until He comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is His*. Later Judah's tribe become the dominant Southern Kingdom in the land of Israel.
- **Zebulun** will live the sea and provide a haven for ships.
- **Issachar** will be like a donkey carrying out forced labour.
- **Dan** would provide justice for his peoples.
- **Gad** would be attacked by raiders but would fight back.
- **Asher** would provide food delicacies for a king.
- **Naphthali** would be fruitful, bearing beautiful children.
- **Joseph** would be especially fruitful because God, *the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel*, would help him.
- **Benjamin** would be like a ravenous wolf devouring prey.

Jacob gave each son *a blessing appropriate to him*. Parents blessing their children like this is a lovely custom. Perhaps it would be something that more parents today could do?

Jacob as the nation Israel.

God promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would make their descendants a great nation and give them the land of Canaan to live in. Today the land and the nation is known by Jacob's God-given name, "Israel".

Often in the Bible the name "Jacob" is used for the whole nation of Israel e.g. Psalm 59:13, Numbers 23:7. Sometimes it is used of just the northern kingdom of Israel e.g. Amos 7:5. God even refers to Himself as “Jacob's King” in Isaiah 41:21.

These uses of Jacob's name reflect the important place he occupies in the Israel's history as the father of the twelve tribes.

The death of Jacob. Genesis 49:29-50:14.

When Jacob was about to die he asked to be buried in the cave at Machpelah in Canaan, where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah were buried. *When Jacob had finished giving his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people.* Joseph had his father embalmed and then there was 70 days of mourning. Afterwards Joseph asked Pharaoh if he could go to Canaan to bury his father, and then return. A large funeral procession went to Canaan, and after another 7 days of mourning, Jacob was buried by his sons in the cave at Machpelah. Afterwards everyone returned to Egypt.



The death of Joseph. Genesis 50:15-26.

When Joseph's brothers saw their father was dead they sent word to Joseph asking him to forgive them, and placed themselves at his feet as slaves. *Joseph wept* and explained that God had used the brother's sin for good. *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.* He told them *not to be afraid and reassured them and spoke kindly to them.* What a great example of forgiveness!

Joseph lived to the age of 110 years old. When he was about to die he made his brothers take an oath that when they returned to Canaan they would take his bones with them. When he died he was embalmed and was *placed in a coffin in Egypt.* Years later, during the Exodus, Moses took the bones of Joseph with him from Egypt (Exodus 13:19) and he was eventually buried at Shechem in a piece of land that Jacob had bought when he was alive (Genesis 33:18-20).

Conclusion

Genesis is the book of beginnings. We have seen how it describes the beginning of the world, of human history, of families, and of civilizations. It also describes the beginning of God's purpose and plan for his creation; how it was affected by the fall, and how God began His process of redemption that culminated in the death and resurrection of Jesus on the cross.

Genesis also introduces us to:

- God's nature. He is Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Redeemer.
- God's creativity. He created the universe, the world, and all living things. People are created *in God's image*.
- God's respect for the value and dignity of human beings. He still wanted to have fellowship with people after the fall, so began the process of redemption.
- the tragedy and consequences of sin - the Fall, separation from God and a sinful nature for all. This means all are under God's judgment and need His redemption.
- God's promise and assurance of salvation through a new covenant brought in through the promised Messiah. Through the Lord Jesus Christ all can have forgiveness of sins, relationship with God and eternal life.

Genesis begins with God. We see Him creating the world in a majestic display of power and purpose, culminating with a man and woman made like Himself. Soon, though, sin entered the world as a result of Satan's deception. Adam and Eve's innocence was lost and the whole of creation was devastated by the by the Fall. Fellowship with God was broken and evil was introduced to the world. Adam and Eve were expelled from their beautiful garden; their first son murdered his brother, and evil grew so much that God finally decided to destroy everyone on earth. A small family was spared, led by the only godly person on earth, Noah.

God decided to provide His people with a means of redemption and revealed his salvation plan to Abraham. God called Abraham to the promised land of Canaan and told him that he would father a covenant people through whom the Saviour of the world would come. Abraham was to live by faith and become the father of all those who would live in a faith relationship with God. The lives of Abraham's descendants Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph show that God was faithful in fulfilling His promises. A covenant people was born – the Israelites, and they did become established in the land of Canaan. Their story is further developed in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy

The people we meet in Genesis are simple, ordinary people, yet through them God did great things. They show us that God can and does use all kinds of people to accomplish His purposes - even people like you and me. So read Genesis and be encouraged. There is hope for the future! No matter how dark the world situation seems, God has a plan and He is working out this plan right now. No matter how insignificant you may feel God loves you and wants to use you as part of His plan. No matter what your situation may be His salvation is now available through the Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful! Read Genesis . . . and have hope!

Discussion questions

1. Identify aspects of this world that had their beginnings described in Genesis - the book of beginnings. For each describe how God worked His purposes and how this has affected His creation.
2. Significant sections of Genesis have been challenged as to their scientific accuracy and/or historicity. e.g. creation, Adam and Eve, Noah and the Ark. What do you believe about this? Were these historical events or were they stories that help us understand God's actions, or some combination of both? Is Genesis a book of science and history? How can we interpret it so that we get a better picture of truth about the early origins of the earth and of people on it?
3. How was Genesis written and recorded? How does knowledge of this affect the way that we read and interpret it?
4. What is the Fall? How has it affected all people on the earth? How has it affected the way that the world operates? Describe the stages of God's plan of redemption so that that the effects of the Fall can be overcome and salvation made available to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.
5. Why did the flood take place? What was God's purpose in sending the flood? Was this purpose achieved? What does the flood show us about God's character?
6. All people on earth are descended from those who were scattered throughout the earth after the flood. What are the implications of this, especially on the way we view people of other races and cultures?
7. Briefly outline the story of each of the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. How did they contribute to God's great plan of redemption? How did they contribute to the establishment of the nation of Israel – the covenant people through whom God would bring salvation to all who would believe in Jesus Christ? What were their personal strengths and weaknesses? What does this tell you about the kind of people that God can use to bring about His purposes?
8. God made specific promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that were described as a "covenant". What were these promises? Who do the promises apply to? What were the requirements that had to be fulfilled for the promises to be fulfilled? Did God fulfil His promises? How were they fulfilled? How does the "new covenant" described in the New Testament relate to the "old covenant" begun in Genesis?
9. The time of exile in Egypt was very significant for the Israelites. What lessons do you think each of the following players in the story learned from this: Joseph, the brothers, Pharaoh, Jacob? What do you learn about God's sovereignty from the way that Joseph was used to deliver his family from the famine?
10. What have you learned from your study of Genesis? How will you apply this in your life in the future?