

BIBLE CHALLENGE

A 6 week study of the book of *Genesis*

Creation through the Flood

Introduction to the book of *Genesis*:

“Genesis” means “beginning” or “origin”. It sets the stage or the entire Bible. The themes we find in Genesis will be woven throughout our reading of the Bible. We will see what God’s intentions were at the creation of the world, and the resultant tragedy and consequences of sin. All the rest of the Bible will be about trying to fix what goes wrong here in Genesis. And so, in Genesis, we also receive the first promises and assurance of salvation.

Monday

Read Chapter 1:1 - 2:3

What to look for:

- Read this chapter as if you were singing a song. Note the refrain, “It was good.”
- Visualize in your mind’s eye a picture of what each of the stanzas of the creation song looked like.
- After reading this chapter, what are your first impressions of God? What was it like when you first held your newborn baby in your arms, or you first examined something you had created? How do those feelings help you understand how God felt at the end of chapter 1?

Tuesday

Read Chapter 2:4 - 25

What to look for:

- Note how the first thing God does after he creates the man is speak to him (vs. 15-17) and give him a directive.
- Note what God asks the man to do in vs. 19.
- Note how the first thing that happens after the creation of the woman is that the man speaks to her.
- The whole story is moving from the creation of the cosmos to the creation of relationships.

Wednesday

Read Chapter 3:1 - 24

What to look for:

- The serpent places the woman between two messages:
+ God’s word: don’t touch the tree, don’t eat it;

- + Serpent's word: go ahead because when you do you'll become like God, knowing good and evil
- So, the drama of chapter 3 is, which word will prevail?
- The serpent says that she will know good from evil. According to vs. 6, did she already know what "good" was? So what did she really want to know?
- Note how serpent's word prevails: the woman knows "good", but "good" wasn't enough for her or the man.
- Note how things change beginning at vs. 7. What is the consequence to the relationship between the man and the woman? Between them and God?
- Note how God shows grace and mercy even at this early stage of the Biblical story. (vs. 21. Also, compare what God says he'll do in vss. 2:17 and 3:3 with what he actually does at the end of the story.)

Thursday

Read Chapter 4:1 - 16

What to look for:

- Note the difference between who Cain is ultimately angry with and who he takes it out on. Cain's rage at his brother is ultimately a rage against God, which he takes out on another human being. Here is where death enters the world for the first time, not by God's hand but by a human's hand.
- One would expect that Cain should suffer the punishment he inflicted on Abel. But what does God do instead? (see vss. 11 and 12, vs. 15)

Friday

Read Chapter 6:9-14a; 17-18, 22

7:11-12, 17-20

8:1-12, 15-16

9:8-13

What to look for:

- Note how God gives Noah two different words, one of warning (6:11-13) and one of promise (6:18). This is a pattern we will see from God throughout the Bible.
- Note how in chapters 7, 8, and 9 God carries through with both the warning and the promise.
- A covenant is a relationship of promise.
- Note how faith was the result of the warning and the promise together, and through faith and obedience Noah was saved.

Babel through A Promise of a Son (Genesis 11 - 18)

Monday:

Read Chapter 11:1-9

What to look for:

- Since one language is the source of their power, God goes after their most powerful tool.
- Note how things have gone from bad to worse since Genesis 3. What starts out good goes bad and gets worse, and we still bear the consequences of that in the form of wars, violence, broken relationships, etc.
- The stage is set now for what the rest of the Bible will be about: bringing humanity back to the point where, like the Garden of Eden, we live in harmony and relationship with God and his will for us.

Tuesday:

Read Chapter 11:26-32

12:1-5

12:10-16

What to look for:

- Following the story of the tower of Babel, we get a long line of who is descended from whom, leading up to Abram's (who will eventually be known as Abraham) appearance. (11:26)
- Note how we get another promise in 12:1-3. This promise is a crucial element in everything that happens next. The promise has three parts, and noting all three parts is very important:
 - Vs 1 – the land
 - Vs 2 – I will make a great nation of you
 - Vs 3 – I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.
- Note how the promise falls into jeopardy almost right away.
 - Vs. 10 --- because of famine, Abram leaves the land he had been promised and goes to Egypt
 - Vs 14-15 – again the promise is in jeopardy: How can Abram have children if he has no wife?
 - If the promise is going to be fulfilled, God is going to have to act to get it back on track.

Wednesday:

Read Chapter 12:17 - 13:2

15:1 - 6

What to look for:

- Note how Abram is dealing with the issue of childlessness (15:2-3) He appoints a slave in his household to be his heir since God hasn't appeared to make good on his promises.
- Underline 15:6. This is one of the key verses for the New Testament. It is the basis for Paul's argument in the New Testament that we are saved by grace through faith.

Thursday:

Read Chapter 16:1 - 12 and verse 15

What to look for:

- There's still a problem. There is no child, and after God says "no" to Abraham appointing an heir, he and Sarai decide they'll try surrogate parenting, thus trying to fulfill God's promise for him if he won't do it for them.
- Note how Abram is presented in vs 5 and 6. If God can use people like Abram, maybe there is hope for the rest of us.
- Still not child by Sarai.

Friday:

Read Chapter 17:1-5, 9-11, 15-19

18:1-15

What to look for:

- As this chapter begins, it has now been 24 years that Abram has been waiting for God to carry out his promise.
- God has new names for Abram and Sarai. In giving them new names, God is marking them out as his own.
- 17:11 is where circumcision as a sign of God's promise comes. This will be important in the New Testament. Christians will ask whether this must remain a sign or initiation into being a follower of Jesus.
- 17:17-19 Note how Abraham still suggests that Ishmael might be the fulfillment of God's promise, and God's reply to that idea.
- Abraham laughs at God, Sarah laughs at God, but who will get the last laugh?

God Keeps His Promise - (Genesis 21 - 24)

Monday:

Read Chapter 21:1-6

What to look for:

- Sarah says, "God has brought me laughter." Who was the one laughing, and why, last week in chapter 18:13? Abraham names their son Isaac, which means "he laughs".
- Have you noticed a pattern last week and in today's reading? God makes a promise, the promise seems to be in jeopardy, and now the promise is kept. But soon, the promise will be in jeopardy again.

Tuesday:

Read Chapter 21:8-20

What to look for:

- We read about Ishmael last week, on Thursday. He is the child that Abraham had with Sarah's slave, Hagar, in an attempt to fulfill God's promise of a son on his own.
- Note on what basis, in verses 12-13 that Abraham decides to send Ishmael away, i.e. does he act based on trust in God's promise, or does he act based on his lack of trust?
- Note how God keeps his promise.

Wednesday:

Read Chapter 22:1-19

What to look for:

- Here's another test of Abraham's trust. How is it similar to the one you read about yesterday?
- Note how, compared to yesterday, there is no promise in this reading, just a command. Thus, Isaac's death will bring an end to God's promise to Abraham
- Notice who in verse 8 is the one who affirms the promise.
- God had promised Abraham that he would make of him a great nation, and in the face of a command from God that would seem to cut short the promise, Abraham still acted in faith.
- Note how in verse 15-18 God honors Abraham's faith and reaffirms his promises.

Thursday:

Read Chapter 23:1-16

What to look for:

- Though this passage may seem insignificant, this is the point at which Abraham first acquires land, which has been part of the Lord's promise to him.
- Note a theme here that gets picked up in the New Testament (Hebrews 11:9,11,13; 1 Peter 1:17, 2:11. The people of God are strangers, pilgrims, foreigners on earth—we are not of this place, we are of God and are simply passing through, so we should not make too strong an attachment.

Friday:

Read Chapter 24:1-4, 10-24, 28-29, 50-51, 57-67

What to look for:

- Note how God's promise continues to be worked out. One son, Isaac, does not a nation make (as God had promised Abraham), so the next step is taken to assure that the promise continues into the next generation.

Jacob and his Sons (Genesis 25 -)

Beginning with these readings, the focus of Genesis shifts to Isaac's son, Jacob. The story of Jacob and, finally, that of his sons will form the narrative for the remainder of the book of Genesis.

The story so far: God made a promise to Abraham that he would give him many descendants and from them form a great nation through which he would bless the whole world. Time and again that promise appears to be threatened: because of Abraham and Sarah's age and inability to have a child, through the way they take God's promises into their own hands and try to work them out on their own, through the near sacrifice of the son, Isaac, that God has finally provided. Now we'll see how the promise continues to face threats, and yet continues to be worked out through Jacob.

Monday:

Read Chapter 25:19-34

What to look for:

- The story of Isaac's family is basically the story of a highly dysfunctional one. Note the problems that exist from the very beginning. What does that suggest about how God can use you, if he can use Isaac, Jacob, and Esau to accomplish his purposes?
- Notice the ways in which Jacob and Esau differ.
- A birthright, which Esau is so quick to give away for the sake of a hungry belly, was something in which the eldest son (Esau) would receive a double share of inheritance upon the death of Isaac. So, a birthright was a future hope for a secure, even wealthy, life, but it was also a hope that was yet a long way off. For a short term gain, Esau gives away a long-term blessing.

Tuesday:

Read Chapter 27

What to look for:

- Yesterday Jacob got his hands on Isaac's birthright. In today's reading he also wants Isaac's blessing, which was something the eldest son (Esau) was to receive upon the death of their father.
- Jacob snatches a blessing that should have gone to Isaac, by disguising himself as his brother. Deception is a theme that runs throughout Jacob's story; much of what he achieves is through resorting to that tactic.
- Jacob, having cheated his brother, decides it's time to get out of town, and return to the "old country" for a wife.

Wednesday:

Read Chapter 28:10-22

What to look for:

- Note God's promise...it's the same promise we've heard him make before to Abraham and to Isaac. Thus, God's original promise is being carried on into subsequent generations. Note also how God is graciously giving the promise to Jacob; Jacob does not have to steal it or win it through deception.

- The name “Bethel” means “House of God”.

Thursday:

Read Chapter 32:22-32

What to look for:

- In the intervening chapters (29-32) Jacob has made his way back to his mother’s family. There he meets Rachel, Laban’s daughter, whom he loves very much. But in a series of deceptions worthy of Jacob himself, Laban tricks Jacob into marrying Rachel’s older sister, Leah, before Laban will allow him to marry Rachel. Having finally married Rachel as well, Jacob decides to return home. To increase his wealth, he in turn tricks Laban into agreeing to a plan by which the best and strongest sheep in Laban’s flocks will become Jacob’s. As Jacob’s deception is revealed, Jacob flees from Laban to return to his own country, which is where today’s reading picks up. Truly a dysfunctional family with shady characters, and yet God uses them to achieve his purposes!
- Note how there is a name change: God changes Jacob’s name from one which means “usurper” to Israel, which means “One who has struggled”. Do you remember why name changes are important? This is where the nation of Israel traces its name and character to: they are a people who struggle with God.

Friday:

Read Chapter 33:1-11; 35:9-15

What to look for:

- Note how Jacob gives back at least a part of what he has stolen: he bows before Esau, giving back the honor he had stolen. He also gives back a portion of his wealth, for he had stolen Esau’s birthright.
- Once again God repeats his promises and blessing to Jacob, who certainly has been a character who did not *deserve* either one. Yet God’s graciousness is such that he is faithful to his promises anyway. God has kept his promise.

Joseph - (Genesis 37 - 43)

The final section of Genesis will now focus primarily on the figure of Joseph, the son of Jacob – whose new name is Israel. (Joseph is Isaac’s grandson, Abraham’s great grandson....you get the pattern by now). Joseph will be the key figure for the rest of the book.

Monday:

Read Chapter 37:1-11, 12-13, 17b-20, 26-35

Note: when you see a “b” in a scripture citation, as above, it means the second half of the verse.

What to look for:

- Note verse 3 and the status that Israel has conferred on Joseph. Remember how parental favoritism ruined the family ties in the previous generation. Why do you think it is difficult to break engrained family patterns of behavior? Does your family exhibit any long-held family traits?
- Pay attention to Joseph's dream. Remembering his status with his father, it would not be unexpected that his brothers would not receive his dream well.
- Joseph's dream will set the tone for what is to come. It is an important foreshadowing for the rest of the story.
- Is it possible that God speaks to you through dreams? How would you know if he did?
- Note in vs 26-28 and vs 31-35 the continuing use of deception in the next generation of this troubled family.
- How does that use of deception and cover-up trace back to Adam and Eve? What does that suggest about what is at the heart of sin and brokenness?

Tuesday:

Read Chapter 39:1, 6-8a, 11-20a

Note: as in yesterday's reading, "a" refers to the first half of a verse.

What to look for:

- Note how Joseph's fortunes rise and fall, and yet God is with him in every circumstance. God's faithfulness and presence is never tied to the surrounding situation.
- If living a life of faithfulness is no guarantee of avoiding pain and heartache, as Joseph's story suggests, then why bother?

Wednesday:

Read Chapter 41:1-8, 25-30, 41

What to look for:

- Joseph is in jail as a result of his run-in with Potiphar's wife.
- In chapter 40, Joseph continues to interpret dreams. A cup bearer tells his dream to Joseph and Joseph indicates that it means his restoration to Pharaoh's court. The chief baker tells Joseph his dream and Joseph tells him it means he will die.
- In today's reading, now Pharaoh is the one who is dreaming and he has two of them. As a result of Joseph's interpretations, his fortunes rise once again, and, in the rest of the chapter, things come to pass as Joseph predicted.

Thursday:

Read Chapter 42:1-3, 6-8, 18-28

What to look for:

- As Joseph had seen in Pharaoh's dream, there is now famine that spreads across the entire land, reaching up into Canaan, the land that God had promised Abraham, where Jacob and his family lived. There was still grain in Egypt because of Joseph's strategy.
- Note all the bowing down that is taking place. Joseph's dream, with which this story cycle began, is now coming true.
- Verse 28: God's plans are being carried out even though the brothers are unaware of it.

Friday:

Read Chapter 43:8-9, 16-31

What to look for:

- The brothers are about to go back to Egypt, but Joseph had insisted that they bring their younger brother, Benjamin with them.

Joseph (continued) - (Genesis 44 - 50)

The story so far: Joseph, Israel's (Jacob) favorite son, after telling his brothers of his dreams in which they bow down to him, is sold into slavery in Egypt by those very brothers who then tell their father he is dead. In Egypt, Joseph's fortunes rise and fall until he becomes a very powerful person in Pharaoh's court. A famine drives Joseph's brothers from their homeland into Egypt seeking grain. There they meet Joseph without realizing it is him (though he recognizes his brothers) and he arranges it to make sure they will return with their youngest brother.

Monday:

Read Chapter 44:1-5, 12-20, 32- Chapter 45:4a

What to look for:

- Remember, Judah is the one who said, "Let's sell Joseph into slavery."
- Note the reversal that has taken place: Judah, who originally wanted to sell Joseph into slavery, has offered to be a slave to Joseph, if Joseph will only let Benjamin, the youngest brother, go.

Tuesday:

Read Chapter 45:25-28, Chapter 46:28-29

What to look for:

- Goshen is right on the edge of Egypt. Remember this name as it will come up again next week in the readings from the book of Exodus.

Wednesday:

Read Chapter 48:14-16, 33- Chapter 50:5, 13-14

What to look for:

- Remember how Jacob came by his blessing from his father, Isaac? Through deceit and theft.
- Now, at the end of his life, Jacob is bestowing blessings on his sons, and Joseph's sons.
- Ephraim and Manasseh are Joseph's sons, Jacob's grandsons.
- Jacob is buried in the same place that Abraham and Sarah were buried.

Thursday:

Read Chapter 50:15-26

What to look for:

- With Jacob dead, the brothers are nervous about what Joseph will do to them
- It's here that the whole theme of deception and trickery reaches its climax: Jacob fooled Isaac and Esau, Jacob fooled Laban, Jacob's sons fooled him, Joseph fooled his brothers. But in what way has God done the ultimate fooling? He has done it by working in disguise. Throughout this family and it's many problems, God has been faithful to his promises, using all their deceptions for his own purposes.
- In the last two verses the stage is set for the next series of readings from Exodus.

Friday:

Read Chapter 50:19-20 (a reprise of these two verses from yesterday)

What to look for:

- If you have not yet underlined vs. 20 in your Bible, do so now.
- Vs. 20 is one of the most significant verses in the Bible for dealing with the problem of suffering: Throughout Joseph's experiences, many of which were painful, he understood God to be present, not as one who *sent or caused* his rotten circumstances, but as one who could *accomplish good* out of what had been evil. In other words, faith helps us to discover God in the midst of pain and suffering, not as One who helps us avoid it, and not as one who sends it upon us purposefully, but as one whose mercy and power makes it possible for him to bring good out of the bad.