

Genesis 12-50

Historical Setting

The Greek word ‘Genesis’ means ‘beginnings’ and we see many things begin in this first book of Holy Scripture. In chapters 1-11 we see the beginning of life itself, the universe, the human race, even sin and suffering. The Good News of Salvation begins in Genesis too - the God who is our Creator and Judge is also a Savior.

Genesis records the beginnings of:	
Earth	1.1 – 2.3
Mankind	2.4-25
Sin	3.1-7
Judgment	3.14-19
Redemption	3.15
Human Race	4.1-15
Unbelieving World	4.16 – 9.29
Nations	10.1-32
Languages	11.1-9
Covenant	12.1-3

The next 65 books of the Bible stand upon the foundation of Genesis. The words which begin the next book “the names of the sons of Israel who entered Egypt with Jacob” (Exodus 1.1) would make no sense without Genesis. And the hopeful words which end the Bible’s last book begin in Genesis - Babylon and the Ancient Serpent will be destroyed, followed by the entrance of God’s people into a Garden with a Tree of Life whose leaves heal the nations.

Theological and Literary Purpose

The text of Genesis does not say who wrote the book or how it was written. The vast majority of Jewish and Christian scholars believe that Moses is the author. There are many good reasons for this opinion. He had the training “Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,” the temperament “was powerful in speech and action” (Acts 7:22), and the time “the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years” (Deuteronomy 8:2) for the writing task. The most compelling reason to believe that Moses wrote Genesis – and indeed the entire Pentateuch – is the witness of the Savior and the Scriptures. From Joshua to Malachi there are several dozen references to “the law of Moses, which he had written” (Joshua 8:32). There are more than eighty references to Moses and his writing ministry in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus asked, “Has not Moses given you the law?” (John 7:19).

If indeed Moses is the author of Genesis, then how did he get his information? He was born before any of it took place. (Moses’ birth is recorded in Exodus 1.) As Christians we believe in the ‘dual authorship’ of Scripture. The Bible is the Word of God in the words of men. The Holy Spirit is the primary author. “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Luke’s words of introduction are instructive and relevant

to every book of the Bible. “I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning; it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you” (Luke 1:3). It is very likely that Moses was both the redactor and the author of Genesis. He gathered existing material and collected it into this book of “beginnings.” No doubt some of the information was passed along by oral tradition. Yet the cryptic phrase, “This is the book of the genealogy of Adam” (Genesis 5:1) challenges the widely held belief in evolution. Adam and Eve were sinless, wise, brilliant, creative, insightful, and perhaps even literate – not pre-human naked savages! Somehow in the plan of God Moses obtained ten ‘books’ (Hebrew word ‘toledoths’) which form the outline structure of his book of Genesis.

The Books of Generations of Genesis (Toledoths)

The Primeval Generations (2.4 – 11.26)

Heaven and Earth (2.4 – 4.26)

Adam (5.1 – 6.8)

Noah (6.9 – 9.29)

Sons of Noah (10.1 – 11.9)

Shem (11.10 – 11.26)

The Patriarchal Generations (11.27 – 50.26)

Terah (11.27 – 25.11)

Ishmael (25.12 – 25.18)

Isaac (25.19 – 35.29)

Esau (36.1 – 37.1)

Jacob (37.2 – 50.26)

Genesis 12-50 begins the story of the Bible. Chapters 1-11 give an essential foundation to the story, but the heart of the Biblical message - Salvation by Grace through Faith – begins with chapter 12. In chapters 1-11 Moses surveys thousands of years (only God knows how many) – from the Creation to the Tower of Babel. Through those many years we meet many people briefly. The focus of those first chapters is more on events than people; the main events are the creation, the fall into sin, the flood, and the tower of Babel. These events give insight and necessary background for the plan of Salvation which is unfolded from chapter 12. As we turn to chapter 12, Moses slows things down. He primarily tells the story of one man and his family; he takes 13 chapters (12-25) to narrate just over 100 years of Abraham’s life. The giant shadow of Abraham – the Father of the Faithful – extends across the entire Old Testament and into the New where the saving work of his Great Son, the Lord Jesus, is described by Paul as “the blessing given to Abraham” (Galatians 3.14).

Outline and Themes of Genesis 12 to 50

If Genesis 1-11 is organized around four events, chapters 12-50 can be outlined around four people – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph – father, son, grandson, and great grandson. Here we read about the ‘first family’ of faith. These are the fathers of the nation of Israel (Patriarchs) - and the first ancestors of our Lord Jesus. They teach us much about God and our walk with Him. Genesis 1-11 is ‘pre-history,’ Biblical ‘history’ begins with chapter 12. ‘Pre history’ does NOT mean the events described in chapters 1-11 are fiction. They did happen! Adam and Eve were as real as Abraham

and Sarah. But the earliest chapters of Genesis are beyond the scope of current historical research. We cannot date the Creation or the Flood with certainty nor can we locate the site of the Garden of Eden with precise accuracy. But we can speak with more historical precision about Abraham and his family. We can be fairly certain that Abraham lived approximately two thousand years before Jesus and traveled in the lands we know today as the Near East.

Chapters	1-11 'Pre-History'	12-50 Recorded History
Emphasis	Events Creation / Fall / Flood / Tower	People Abraham / Isaac / Jacob / Joseph
Scope	Whole World	Covenant People
Time	1,000's of years (at least)	300 years

Purpose – Abraham

The great drama of the Biblical story is outlined in the first verses of Genesis 12. God makes three promises to Abram which are unfolded right up to the end of Revelation – a son who would become a nation, a holy territory that represents the earth, and a blessing for all nations. The incredible scope of these promises is far beyond the wildest imaginations of this elderly gentleman. But despite their incredulity he embraced them with simple faith which brought great blessing to him and his children (15.6, Galatians 3.9)

The son of Abraham and Sarah (despite their foolish and faithless activities with Hagar), was the 'firstborn of many brothers.' Through Isaac came a nation. The two thousand year story – told from Genesis to the Gospels – follows the exploits of that nation of Israel. They are the ancestors of the chief character of Scripture, the Lord Jesus. The few shining moments of Israel's history present a foretaste of the greatness of Jesus. The many failures of Israel highlight how desperately they need His redeeming work. But throughout the centuries God keeps His promises; by Solomon's reign "The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore" (1 Kings 4:20).

God was faithful to His promise of land. The story of the Old Testament traces their relationship to the Promised Land. When the nation was faithful to their Covenant, their Covenant God blessed them in their land. When they break Covenant, they lose it. In their best days in the land they shone forth as a 'home of righteousness' for the neighbor-nations to see the Lord among His people. God's promise and purpose was never meant to be confined to the small territory of Canaan. His redemptive purpose is as wide as the whole world. "Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world" (Romans 4:13).

Blessing the nations was the hardest promise for Israel to swallow. The Old Testament reveals little love between Israel and her neighbors, nor in the dealings of Abraham and his line. Abraham's lying brings a curse on King Abimelech and Jacob trades tricks with Laban. The positive example of Joseph's benefit to Egypt ends with the country in ruins because of Pharaoh's hard heart. Yet in the pages of the New Testament the fullness of this wonderful promise of blessing is found. Samaritans

who met Jesus realized His global mission, “we know that this man really is the Savior of the world” (John 4.42).

Promise – Isaac

From chapters 21 through 27 we read about the ‘son of promise.’ Yet, the personality of Isaac is not detailed. He says very little. Mostly we learn about the people around him – his parents, his wife, and his sons - we know his servant (Eliezar) even better than his master. The name Isaac means ‘he laughs.’ This is not because he was a funny person. Actually, the Bible never describes him laughing. But his name is appropriate because of the surprising joy his life brings, many laugh with deep gratefulness because of Isaac.

Abram literally means ‘great father.’ Can you imagine how many times Abram and Sarah must have been asked, ‘Great father! My! How many children do you have anyway?’ They must have hung their heads in shame as they answered, ‘None!’ It is understandable why Abraham and Sarah both laugh when God promises they will have a son in their old age (17.17, 18.10-12). Because of Isaac, Abram becomes ‘Abraham’ ‘father of a multitude.’ Isaac is among the innumerable company who receive the promise of forgiveness through The Promise Child – the Lord Jesus. “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ” (2 Corinthians 1.20).

The story of Isaac also reveals the nature of our walk of faith. While his father’s life is filled with adventures and dramatic meetings with God, Isaac’s life is rather tame. Faith in God’s promise, even being a son of promise, is no less real by its quiet and mundane expression. “We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Purity – Jacob

With Isaac’s son Jacob, the high drama resumes. Most of Jacob’s exploits come about from living out the meaning of his name, ‘thief or cheater.’ Those who cross his path are victims of his tricks, even his own father and brother. Sometimes preacher’s kids (including my own) are known to be rascals. Jacob was a ‘member’ of the faith family but he fails at his own faith. Even his prayer at Bethel before the ‘ladder of God’ is no more than a crass bargain; “God if you give me everything I need, I will give you a tenth!” (Read Genesis 28.20-22).

Jacob’s life highlights the other side of the ‘coin’ of faith – repentance. Faith and repentance must go together, Jacob had neither. He mistook the promise for presumption. He presumed he was ‘covered’ by the faith of this faithful father and grandfather. But there is no second-hand faith. God has no spiritual ‘grandsons.’ The promise of blessing was real for Jacob, but he could not obtain that promise without faith and repentance. So God the Promise Keeper came at night to make Jacob ready to receive the promises. Just as sometimes a Near Eastern shepherd must break the legs of a wayward lamb, God came to fight Jacob. And in the strength of his mighty flesh Jacob fights through the night. But with a touch on his hip, God breaks and remakes this thief. Now Jacob’s prayer is not a bargain but a gasp of desperation, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (Genesis 32:26). His change in name reflects

a change in nature – “Israel” – God rules. The heart that submits in repentance and faith receives the blessing.

Providence – Joseph

The Bible says nothing bad about Joseph. He was not perfect. Yet he points us to The Sinless One who also went from being rejected to ruling the world – our Lord Jesus. Behind the life of Joseph we see a Sovereign God who opens doors which no man can shut, and closes doors which no man could open. The shadow of Abraham, and the marvelous promises he received from God, hang over Joseph’s life. Through him God saved the promised nation. Even the strongest empire on earth is in the hand of God; a mighty Pharaoh is no match for the Mighty God. The book of Exodus will make this abundantly clear.

From the human perspective Joseph is carried to places of extreme difficulty; from the pit his brothers tossed him into to the prison Potiphar threw him into. Scripture is silent about the years of despair and feelings of abandonment this faithful servant must have felt. After many long painful years he faces his heartless brothers, now they are in the ‘pit’ and he is on the throne. They are guilty and afraid. Fortunately for them there is more than a ‘human perspective’ to this story. Joseph was not alone in those dark hours. Even a godless ruler could see the evidence of Joseph’s companion and strength as he asks, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" (Genesis 41:38). Through the years of difficulty God was designing Joseph to be more like Jesus. Joseph was most Christ-like when he spoke words of pardon and peace from his throne to his guilty brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50.20). Any New Testament Christian who does not think Old Testament believers can teach them anything should pay more careful attention to these four men. Here Joseph shows the fruit of faithful suffering, a man freed from bitterness, a man filled with Holy Spirit, a man like Jesus. Here is a man who can trace the hand of God’s gracious providence even through his tears. Here is a man who knows, “that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8.28).

Bible Study Questions from Genesis 12 to 50

Genesis 12:1-13:4

1. According to God’s call, what was Abram to leave and where was he to go? Why was it necessary for him to leave his past life in order to receive God’s blessing?
2. Where did Abram and his family go? Who was Lot and what was his relationship to Abram?
3. Why did Abram go to Egypt? Compare his motives in going to Egypt with his motives in going to Canaan.
4. What would it mean for you to pick up and accept a call as Abram did? Could you? How might we demonstrate a faithful response to God's initiative these days?

Genesis 13:1-18

1. Why did a problem arise between Abram and Lot? What does this problem show about God's blessings? How did the Canaanites and Perizzites complicate the problem?
2. How did Abram propose to solve the problem? How has his attitude toward material things and people changed since he went to Egypt?
3. How did Lot's lifestyle probably change? What does the author tell us about Sodom? What does his move toward Sodom show about him? Did he intend to give up his faith? What ominous hint does the author give about the future of Sodom?
4. After Lot left, what promise did God give Abram? How is it similar to the promise in 12:2,3? How is it different? What does this teach about God?

Genesis 14:1-24

1. Who was Kedorlaomer and what was his position in the political structure of that region? Where was his kingdom? Who were his allies? Why did he go to war?
2. Who were the kings allied with Bera king of Sodom? Where did the big battle between the 4 kings and the 5 kings take place? Who won? What was the result to the defeated cities? (Look at a map if possible.)
3. How did Abram get involved in this war? What does this teach about him?
4. What was the outcome of the war? How might Abram's involvement in this conflict have changed his relationships with the Canaanites? What temptations might this victory present to him?
5. Who were the two kings that came to meet Abram after he returned from defeating Kedorlaomer? How were they different? In what respect do they represent two alternative life directions before Abram?

Genesis 15:1-21

1. Review Abram's accomplishments in the last chapter. How did these things leave Abram vulnerable to calculation and doubt?
2. Read verses 2 and 3. What does this complaint show about Abram's desire and concern? About his faith and relationship with the Lord?
3. Read verse 6. What does it mean that "Abram believed the Lord"? What does it mean that the Lord "credited it to him as righteousness"? Why is faith in God's promise so important? What can you learn here about the source and nature of righteousness in us?

4. Read verses 9-11; 16-21. What was the meaning of the ceremony the Lord told Abram to perform? What was the covenant the Lord made with Abram? Why was this important, and what decision did Abram make in response to it?

5. Read verses 12-15. What did the Lord tell Abram about his descendants in a vision? What can you learn here about God's sovereign control of history?

Genesis 16:1-17:27

1. Read v. 1-6. How did Sarai's solution reveal her fundamental problem in regard to God's promise to her husband? Why did Abram agree with her? What was the outcome? (4-6) What caused such a conflict in Abram's family?

2. Read v. 7-16. How did God show his care for Hagar? What direction did the angel give to her? How can we accept God's sovereign will over our lives which does not necessarily match with our own will?

3. Read 17:4-8. Why did God change Abram to Abraham? Do you think Abraham was God's hope for the world in history?

4. Read v. 9-14. What was the practical way for Abraham to enter into the covenant relationship with God? What if Abraham did not undergo circumcision?

5. Read v. 15-22. What does it mean that God changed Sarai to Sarah? Why should we never compromise the promise of God with the promise of the world?

Genesis 18:1-19:38

1. How did Abraham show hospitality to the guests? Notice how his actions are described, the participation of his household, and the content of the meal. What does this event show about Abraham and his family? About the Lord? About Abraham's relationship to the Lord?

2. What was the message of good news they brought? What was Sarah's response to the good news? Did they want her to overhear? What did God want Sarah to learn?

3. Why did the Lord decide to tell Abraham what he was about to do? (16-19) What was God's promise and what must Abraham do to claim that promise? (18-19)

4. How did the people of Sodom treat Lot and his guests? Were there as many as ten righteous men in the city (4,5)? What can you learn in verses 1-9 about Lot's life in Sodom? (See 2 Peter 2:7,8) How had Lot been influenced by the Sodomites?

5. How did Lot respond to the angel's warning? Why did he finally leave? What does this show about God's grace? What happened to Sodom? To Lot's wife? Why was Lot spared?

6. What was the problem of Lot's daughters? How did they rationalize their sin? Are there any modern parallels? What was the tragic fruit of this family? What can you learn from contrasting the faith and lives of Abraham and Lot?

Genesis 20:1-21:33

1. Read v. 20:1-2. Why do you think Abraham moved away into Philistine territory? Who was Abimelech, and how did Abraham lie to him? Why did Abraham lie? What does his habit of lying show his struggle between fear and faith? (See 12:10-20)?
2. Read v. 21:1-2. What does the birth of Isaac teach Abraham and us about God? Why is God's faithfulness our only hope? How has God been faithful to you?
3. Read v. 8-14a. What was the problem between Isaac and Ishmael? What did Sarah ask Abraham to do? What can we learn from Abraham about taking responsibility for our sins?
4. Read v. 14b-21. Describe Hagar's despair. How was God with her? Why did God take care of her and her son?
5. Read v. 33-34. How had the Eternal God trained Abraham to overcome fear and to be his servant in Philistine territory? How can we receive God's training faithfully and become his responsible servant in a sinful and rebellious world?

Genesis 22:1-19

1. Read v. 3-6. What was Abraham's attitude toward God's command? What is significant about the fact that only Abraham and Isaac climbed the mountain?
2. Read v. 7-10. What was Isaac's concern? How could Abraham answer his son like this?
3. Read v. 15-19. What is the angel's second message? What is God's reward to Abraham and Isaac? How extensive is the outcome of Abraham's obedience?

Genesis 23:1-24:67

1. Read v. 23:1-20. How did Abraham show his concern for his departed wife? What can we learn about his life of faith from this event?
2. Read v. 24:1-9. What mission was given to the chief servant? What does it show about his view toward the purpose of marriage?
3. Read v. 10-21. How did the servant prepare for the mission (10-11)? How did he wait on God (17-21)?
4. Read v. 62-67. Describe the meeting between Isaac and Rebekah. What can we learn from this passage about the importance of faith, obedience, and mission in marriage?

Genesis 25:19-34

1. What was the problem in Isaac's family? How was Isaac's way of dealing with this problem different from the way his father Abraham had dealt with a similar problem?

2. When and how did God answer Isaac's prayer? What might they have learned through waiting?
3. How were Jacob and Esau different from one another at birth? What suggestions about their future characters are found in the account of their birth? (24-26)
4. How did Esau come to sell his birthright to Jacob? What is the birthright? Why did Jacob want it? What does this show about him?

Genesis 26:1-35

1. Read v. 1-6. Why did Isaac go to Abimelech? What was God's command to Isaac and what was his promise? How would you characterize Isaac's faith at this time?
2. Read v. 16-18. What surprising reaction did Isaac's neighbors have to his success? How was this a test of his faith?
3. Read v. 26-35 What was Isaac's victory, and how did he win it? Why did he name the new well Shibah? What mistake did Esau make and how did it affect Isaac's family?
4. What can we learn here about the way God works in his people, and the faith he wants his people to have? How can you fight the spiritual battle to keep God's promise, in spite of worldly obstacles?

Genesis 27:1-28:22

1. Why did Isaac think he would die soon? (His death is recorded in 35:28,29) What did he want to do before he died? How did he instruct Esau to prepare to receive his blessing?
2. How did Jacob respond? What were the good and bad things Jacob learned from Rebekah?
3. Why could Isaac not just change his blessing when he realized Jacob had deceived him?
4. How might Jacob have felt his first night away from home? (10-11) What part of God's promise in Jacob's dream was the original Abrahamic covenant and what part was especially for Jacob at this time?

Genesis 29:1-30:24

1. Describe Jacob's meeting with Rachel. What does this event reveal about Jacob?
2. Describe the struggle between Leah and Rachel. What did each one want that the other had?

3. What can you learn from the human and spiritual struggles of Leah and Rachel? How did God use these struggles to accomplish his own purpose? Describe the atmosphere in Jacob's home.

Genesis 30:25-31:55

1. Why did Jacob want to leave Paddan Aram? Why did Laban want him to remain? What was Jacob's new direction? (25-30)
2. Look at 31:4-12. What do Jacob's words to Rachel and Leah tell us about Laban's continued treachery? What can we learn here about Jacob?
3. When Laban caught up with Jacob, why did he not harm him? What can you learn here about God's faithfulness?
4. What do these events reveal about Jacob's character? Think about his strengths and weaknesses. What do these events teach us about God?

Genesis 32:1-33:11

1. How had Jacob's wealth and even his family become a burden? How did he calculate about and prepare for Esau's coming? What can we learn from this?
2. Who was the man who wrestled with Jacob until daybreak? (24,28,30) What is the significance of this wrestling match?
3. Who seems to have won the wrestling match? What blessing do you think Jacob wanted? What does this event teach us about God?
4. What is the significance of Jacob getting a new name? Why did Jacob want to know the man's name?
5. Describe the meeting of Jacob and Esau. Why did Jacob say that seeing Esau's face was like "seeing the face of God"?

Genesis 33:12-35:29

1. Where did Jacob decide to settle down? Why could this not be what God wanted? (31:13; 28:20-22)
2. Describe the event that forced Jacob to leave Shechem. (34:1-31) How did Simeon and Levi displease Jacob? (30-31; 49:5-7) What does Jacob's attitude at this time show about his change of character?
3. Where was Bethel and what important event in Jacob's life had happened there? What did it mean to Jacob to return to Bethel? (28:10-22; 31:13; 35:1,3)
4. What were the joys and sorrows which Jacob experienced in this chapter? (8,16-29)

5. Read 47:7-10, Jacob's meeting with Pharaoh. What does this tell us about Jacob's faith and life? Read 48:15. (Jacob's blessing on Joseph). What light does this shed on Jacob's life? What can we learn about the God of Jacob?

Genesis 37:1-39:23

1. Why did Joseph's brothers hate him? (2,3,4,5,8,11) What was his home atmosphere probably like?
2. Describe Joseph's dreams. In the absence of a written Bible, how might God use dreams in Joseph's life? Why didn't his brothers have dreams?
3. Who was Tamar? Why did Judah say, "She is more righteous than I..." (38:26) How does God use her to bring Judah back into the covenant history? (See also Matthew 1:2,3)
4. How did Potiphar's wife try to seduce Joseph? What was involved in the temptation other than physical desire? What do we learn about Joseph through his refusal?
5. How could Joseph avoid becoming bitter and fatalistic in prison? What does it mean that "God was with Joseph"? What can you learn from Joseph's faith and life?

Genesis 40:1-41:57

1. What was Joseph's situation when he met the king's cupbearer and baker? What was their situation? How did Joseph show a shepherd's concern for these men? What did he teach them about God?
2. How were these dreams fulfilled? How did Joseph show himself to be an honest and fearless, and authoritative teacher of God's revealed will?
3. How did Joseph prepare to go to Pharaoh? After listening to Pharaoh's dreams, what did Joseph teach him about God's sovereign control of nature and history?
4. What un-asked-for advice did Joseph give Pharaoh? How does this show his concern for Pharaoh and Egypt?
5. What did Joseph name his sons? What does this reveal about his faith?

Genesis 42-44

1. Read v. 42:1-5. Why did Jacob send ten of his sons to Egypt? How urgent was their problem in Canaan? Why did he not send Benjamin?
2. Read v. 25-28. What additional anxiety did Joseph give his brothers? Why?
3. Read v. 29-38. What report did they give their father? What reveals the sorrow and fatalism in Jacob's heart?

4. Read v. 23-34. How did the steward reassure them? Describe their meeting with Joseph. What astonished the brothers?

5. Read v. 44:1-13. What serious problem did Joseph create for his brothers as they were leaving Egypt? Why did he do this?

Genesis 45:1-50:26

1. How did Joseph reassure his brothers? What meaning did he see in the tragedy of being sold as a slave? How did his mission make him great? What can we learn about God?

2. How did Joseph help his family practically? (Think about spiritual help, material help, and human help toward having independent lives.)

3. How did Joseph regard his position in Egypt? (45:8) What does this reveal about his attitude toward people, toward material things, and toward God?

4. How did Joseph deal with the people of Egypt who were starving because of the famine? (47:13-26) How did the people respond to this treatment? Why? (25)

5. How did Jacob bless Joseph's sons? (48:1-21) What is the significance of this blessing in Israel's history? Joseph is not in Jesus' genealogy. In what way does he point to Jesus?