

# Genesis

## Introduction

### *Genesis 1:1*

The opening sentence of the Bible sets the context for everything.

It fulfils two functions:

1. It satisfies the basic human urge to know where we have come from.
2. It challenges every attempt to live in rebellious independence of our Creator.

*the heavens and the earth* means absolutely everything there is.

*the heavens* is the skies and outer space.

Notice three main things about *the heavens and the earth*.

- 1. There was a beginning.**
- 2. It was God who initiated everything**
- 3. God made everything out of nothing**

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At this point we pause to consider two things.

### **1. Who wrote Genesis?**

The author is traditionally assumed to be Moses (Luke 24:44).

Seven times 'the Law of Moses' is mentioned, and reference is made to a text from the Pentateuch:

1 Kings 2:3 (Deuteronomy 26:17; 30:16); 2 Chronicles 23:18; Ezra 3:2 (Leviticus 6:12); Daniel 9:11, 13 (Deuteronomy 28:15ff); Luke 2:22 (Leviticus 12:6); John 7:23 (Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3); 1 Corinthians 9:9 (Deuteronomy 25:4).

Five times the Pentateuch is referred to as 'The Book of Moses':

2 Chronicles 25:4 (Deuteronomy 24:16); 2 Chronicles 35:12 (Exodus 12:43-48; Deuteronomy 16:3); Ezra 6:18 (Numbers 3-4); Nehemiah 13:1 (Deuteronomy 23:3); Mark 12:26 (Exodus 3).

On two occasions the Pentateuch is called 'the Book of the Law of Moses', and a specific text is mentioned: Joshua 8:31 (Deuteronomy 27:5-6); 2 Kings 14:6 (Deuteronomy 24:16).

Ten times a reference to a text from the Pentateuch is preceded by a phrase such as 'Moses commanded'. Or, 'Moses said'. Or 'Moses wrote':

Matthew 8:4 (Leviticus 14:10; 21-22); Matthew 19:7-8 (Deuteronomy 24:1-4); Matthew 22:24 (Deuteronomy 25:5-6); Mark 7:10 (Exodus 20:12; 21:17; Leviticus 20:9; Deuteronomy 5:16); Luke 20:37 (Exodus 3); John 8:5 (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:21-24); Acts 3:22; 7:37 (Deuteronomy 18:15); Romans 10:5 (Leviticus 18:5); Romans 10:19 (Deuteronomy 32:21).

### **2. What is the structure of the book of Genesis?**

Ten times we come across the phrase, *these are the generations of* .... And once it is worded, *this is the book of the generations of*... (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2).

These eleven texts divide Genesis into sections. So the first of Genesis' eleven "chapters" really begins at 2:4. 1:1 to 2:3 is a prologue.

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## **The Prologue**

### ***Genesis 1:2***

Two matters concern us here.

#### **(1) What is the significance of the dark and formless void?**

*without form and void* is often said to mean confusion and disorder. However, this seems to cast doubt on the Creator's wisdom.

Some people try to solve that problem by suggesting a huge interval between verses 1 and 2 (the 'gap theory').

However, this is not the natural way to read the first two verses of Scripture.

We need a more positive explanation. The Septuagint translates as *invisible and unprepared*.

Basil suggests three reasons why the earth could have been *invisible* at first: (1) Human beings were not yet created. (2) The solid ground was still submerged under water. (3) Light had not yet been created.

The earth was *unprepared*, not yet ready, for human beings (see Isaiah 45:18).

#### **(2) What is the nature of the Spirit's hovering?**

Some people have translated: 'the Spirit of God was brooding...'. However, this breaks down the distinction between God and creation.

The same verb is used in Deuteronomy 32:11. The parent bird flutters over its young. It is watching. It is a protective hovering.

So here. The Spirit is keeping watch over the new creation. He is preserving it from harm and danger.

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### ***Genesis 1:3-25.***

Creation took place over six days. Within each day three common features keep on appearing.

**(1) There are the words, *Then God said.***

**(2) There is a phrase indicating the exact fulfilment of God's word.**

**(3) There is a statement that God saw that what he had created was *good.***

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Next we look at the things created. Notice these seven things.

THE FIRST THING CREATED was light (verse 3). This amounts to, 'Let there be colour'. God's first concern is that creation should be beautiful.

THE SECOND THING CREATED was safety (verses 6-11). In Scripture water symbolizes danger and destruction (eg. Psalm 42:7). God set bounds for the waters.

THE THIRD THING CREATED was food (verses 11-12). God speaks reproductive potential into the very fabric of the earth. He is making permanent provision for human need.

THE FOURTH THING CREATED for our need was structure or order (verses 14-18). They were created *to give light*. But three other purposes are stated as well:

(1) *To separate the day from the night* (verses 14, 18).

(2) *To be for signs* (verse 14).

(3) *To rule over the day and the night* (verses 16,18)

Two further comments on these verses:

i) Some people argue that verse 1 implies that the sun, moon and stars were already there. So verse 14 is the moment when their function was allocated.

It is probably better to understand verse 1 to mean that the heavens were water-filled space to begin with. Only on Day Four were they filled with lights.

ii) Verse 16 ends with a brief phrase: *and the stars*. It is almost an after-thought. This may be because of the temptation to worship the stars, or because the stars are insignificant for human benefit.

THE FIFTH THING CREATED was an aesthetically pleasing environment.

(1) Verses 20 and 21 speak of *swarms of living creatures*.

(2) The same verses tell of the creation of birds. And their flight across the sky has a decorative effect.

(3) Three times in verses 21 and 25 we read the word *every*. This superabundance shows that God meant his world to be picturesque and splendid.

THE SIXTH THING CREATED was stability. Notice the phrase *according to their kinds* (verses 21, 24, 25, cf. verses 11, 12).

God has fixed certain things which cannot be changed. So we are not left feeling insecure.

THE SEVENTH THING CREATED was the blessing of reproductive powers. The second half of verse 22 explains the first half. *God blessed them*. He said, *Be fruitful and multiply*.

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### **Genesis 1:26-28**

The heart of the prologue. God has completed the preparations. Now it is time for him to make human beings.

These verses set humanity in the context of creation as a whole: (1) Human beings were created on the same day as the land animals. (2) The same blessing is given to the creatures of the water and the air and to human beings (verses 22, 28).

But the major point of these verses is human uniqueness and distinctiveness.

The main issue raised by these verses is this: what is it for the human race to be created in the image of God?

Some people suggest that the image means human dominion (verse 26). God has set up on earth an image of his governing authority over all the earth. Dominion is summed up in the word *subdue* (verse 28): human beings are to do everything they do in the world as an expression of worship.

However, it is better to make a distinction between the image and the dominion.

In verse 27 the first two lines make the same point twice: they are expressing wonder at the fact that human beings exist in the divine image. The third line tells us what it means to be the image of God. It has to do with relationship.

This reflects the divine plurality. God exists as Trinity. God said, *Let us make man*. This way of putting it seems to point to the divine plurality.

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For a more complete understanding of the image we must look beyond this passage. The New Testament suggests two things.

(1) The image has to do with moral rectitude. (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10).

(2) The image is seen in Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15).

The human body is included in the concept of the image. Adam's body was a reflection of what the Son of God was to become when he became incarnate in human nature (Hebrews 10:5).

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### ***Genesis 1:29-30***

The key words are *I have given*. And that sets the tone for the whole of the rest of Scripture. The Bible tells the story of a giving God.

### ***Genesis 1: 31***

The creation really was excellent, as good as it could possibly be.

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### ***Genesis 2:1-3***

What we have now is a completed creation. The seventh day is the day of divine rest, the rest of satisfaction with a job perfectly done.

God *blessed the seventh day and made it holy*. He attached a blessing to the day for us (Mark 2:27).

God's seventh-day rest is the foundation for the Sabbath principle. The Sabbath was already in place before the commandments were given. This implies two things:

- (1) The Sabbath is not a law applicable to the Jews only.

(2) The Sabbath is not just a provision for a sinful world.

However, in instituting the Sabbath, God was already making preparations for the time when sin would enter the world. The Sabbath was a signpost to the cross. The Sabbath is as a sign that it is the LORD who saves his people. The Sabbath tells us that we must finish trying to save ourselves by our works.

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## **Section One: 2:4-4:26**

This part of Genesis deals with what happened following on the formation of the universe. The main theme is the sad departure from a marvellous beginning.

### ***Genesis 2:4-25***

This passage is mainly an elaboration of the events of the second part of Day Six.

One notable feature now is the use of the name *the LORD*. This is God's personal, covenant name. It was not used in chapter 1. But it is appropriate now because human beings are present in the world. And it is with human beings that God makes covenant.

Verses 5 and 6 are a flashback to the conditions in 1:2. 2:6 describes conditions before the events of 1:6. *Mist* may mean 'flood'. And this verse is looking back to the time when the whole earth was submerged under water. Then in 2:7 we jump straight to Day Six.

Verse 7 depicts God as a potter. This celebrates three things: (1) The LORD's skill in forming such an intricate creature. (2) The LORD's rights over what he has formed. (3) The LORD's loving commitment to the people he has formed.

The man is made out of *dust from the ground*. This emphasises that human beings take their place within God's creation (see 1 Corinthians 15:47). But the man came to life as the LORD God *breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*.

In verse 5 we have the first hint of the purpose of human life: *to work the ground*. Verse 15 expands on this. The purpose of human life is to bring out the latent potential within God's creation.

The LORD God *put* the man *him in the Garden of Eden* (verse 15). The word implies safety and contentment. 'Eden' means pleasure, delight, luxury.

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We cannot say with certainty where Eden was located. But it possibly occupied the Sinai and Arabian peninsulas, and stretched as far north as modern-day Turkey. From east to west it stretched from the Tigris to the Mediterranean Sea.

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Let's think now about the trees in the garden.

The first thing that verse 9 says about the trees is that they were *pleasant to the sight*. They were also *good for food*. But the aesthetic quality of the trees is mentioned first. This reminds us how much beauty matters to God.

Verse 9 informs us that *the tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*.

Leupold and Kidner use an analogy which is helpful for understanding *the tree of life*. They describe the tree as ‘sacramental’. It is not that merely eating the fruit of this tree would confer life. John Gill says that for Adam, this tree was “a sign, token, and symbol to him of his dependence on God; that he received his life from him; and that this was preserved by his blessing and providence”.

How are we to understand *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*?

There are three ways of understanding the significance of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

1. *Good and evil* is a way of saying ‘absolutely everything’.
2. The man has a merely theoretical knowledge of the difference between good and evil at this stage. To eat from this tree would give the man a knowledge from experience.
3. The man already has the knowledge of good and evil. If he disobeys God’s command and eats from this tree, he will lose that knowledge.

Option 1 can be dismissed: it is hard to see how eating from this tree could make human beings omniscient.

We have to choose between options 2 and 3. Our decision hinges on our understanding of the LORD’s words in 3:22. They are probably best translated: *the man was like one of us in knowing good and evil*. The man has lost the knowledge of good and evil (cf. Romans 3:20; Acts 17:30; Ephesians 2:1; 4:18).

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Verses 18-25 emphasize that the human being is a social creature.

Verse shows that the basis for marriage between one man and one woman is found in the created nature of human beings. No other pattern of sexual relations is acceptable.

Marriage involves three things: (1) Leaving; (2) Holding fast. (3) Becoming one flesh.

At that stage of history everything was in harmony. Verse 25 tells us that the man and woman *were not ashamed*. They had nothing to be ashamed of. They were right with God. Right with each other. Each person was right within himself or herself. Shame was an entirely unknown emotion.

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### **Genesis 3**

Verses 1-5: the serpent’s approach to the woman. This is a real serpent. But it is being used by the devil

It is significant that the devil selects one of God’s creatures (see Romans 1:25). Satan is using the serpent. This means that a fall has already taken place in the spiritual realm (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).

Some people argue that the woman’s words in verse 3 suggest that she is already being lured away from total loyalty to the LORD, so the fall has already taken place. When the woman took the fruit in verse 6 that was just the outward result.

However, 1 John 3:4 shows that sin involves breaking God’s law. Right up to the last moment the woman could have turned back. It was the act of disobedience which constituted the fall.

In verse 4 the serpent effectively calls God a liar. But in fact it is Satan who is *the father of lies* (John 8:44).

The serpent’s enticement in verse 5 is deceptive. They already know good from evil.

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Verse 6: the fall itself. Here is the act of disobedience. The three descriptions of the tree are taken up in 1 John 2:16.

It is the man's participation which is the real problem (1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 5:14). Because of Adam, we are all dead in sin.

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Verses 7-13: the immediate aftermath of the fall. Verse 7 is ironic in view of verse 5

The attempt to cover themselves with *fig leaves* continues in our inherited tendency to try to cover our moral shame with devices of our own.

Verse 9 is a revelation of amazing grace.

In verse 11 the LORD offers them the opportunity for confession and repentance. But Adam fails to seize the opportunity.

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Verses 14 and 15: the LORD pronounces judgment on the serpent. To eat dust is a declaration of total defeat (Micah 7:16-17; Psalm 72:9)

Verse 15 explains how Satan's total defeat will take place. This verse is the hub around which all Biblical prophecy revolves. The rest of Scripture unfolds the meaning of this text.

The second part of the verse is more individual than the first part. Satan's defeat by the Lord Jesus Christ is being foretold. But Jesus' victory brings immense cost to himself. There is also the hint here that the ultimate offspring of the woman will be born of a virgin.

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Verses 16-19: the LORD's judgment on the human race.

### **1. The judgment on the woman (verse 16)**

There are two main aspects:

(1) Pain – especially in childbirth.

(2) Friction – between husband and wife. *Desire* means the urge to dominate and control. But God will not allow the woman to usurp her husband's headship.

### **2. The judgment on the man (verses 17-19)**

The ground is cursed. This will frustrate human efforts at cultivation.

And because the earth is cursed, human life on earth is marked by pain and sweat. And finally, there is death.

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Verse 21: the LORD's provision of adequate clothing. Skins now replace the fig leaves. For this to happen the first death in history had to take place. An animal's life had to be sacrificed to provide covering for Adam and Eve. By that provision, their death is postponed. Two vital truths are prefigured here.

(1) Substitution. An animal lost its life to enable Adam and Eve to live on. This principle was fulfilled in the sacrifice of Jesus' life as our substitute. The result is that we live for ever.

(2) Imputation. These clothes are symbolic of Christ's righteousness imputed to the believer. That righteousness is an adequate covering for us in the sight of God (see Isaiah 61:10).

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Verses 22-24: the exclusion from Eden.

It would be a horrific thing if man should live forever in the condition of moral confusion. It is an act of God's goodness not to permit man to live for ever, until he has remedied the situation. So in verse 23 Adam and Eve are driven out of the garden. And there is no way back. Ever since then, every human being has been born outside Eden, in sin.

Verse 24 says that the way back is blocked by cherubim. Cherubim had four faces (Ezekiel 10:20-22): a human face, and the faces of a lion, an ox, and an eagle (Ezekiel 1:10). The four faces represent every conceivable part of creation. The whole creation, including the human conscience, says a resounding 'No' to any idea that the human race can return to paradise as a sinner.

And yet, by placing cherubim there, God holds out the promise of mercy. The cherubim were found in the tabernacle. There were models of them on the mercy seat. A God of astounding grace does not abandon his creatures when they sin.

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#### **Genesis 4**

Life outside the garden is one of constant moral decline, ending in spiritual barrenness.

We assume that the LORD must have instructed Adam in the need for sacrifices. Adam in turn passed on the instructions to his sons.

Why did the LORD respond differently to each *offering*?

Hebrews 11:4 shows that Abel's sacrifice was an expression of genuine faith. 1 John 3:12 tells us that Abel's deeds were righteous.

Righteousness is God's gracious gift to those who have true faith. And true faith always looks to the sacrifice of Christ.

Abel's sacrifice was acceptable because it was the blood sacrifice of a lamb. It truly anticipated Calvary in a way that Cain's bloodless sacrifice could not.

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Now decline sets in. Cain's own sins escalated. One sin led to another.

Sin has become rooted in the human heart, but sin is still not intrinsic to human life. This is brought out by the LORD's words in verse 7. Sin is lying in wait like a wild animal ready to pounce.

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In verse 10 the LORD says to Cain, *The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground* (cf. Matthew 23:5; Luke 11:51; Hebrews 12:24) Abel's blood cried out for justice. Jesus' blood speaks the

prayer of forgiveness. Hebrews 11:4 says that Abel himself still speaks. He says that to lose your life for the LORD's sake is not a bad exchange.

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Now, in verse 11 the curse touches human life itself. The LORD is demonstrating the seriousness of sin.

But the most noticeable thing here not the curse, but the mercy which the LORD shows to Cain. In response to the anxieties which Cain expresses in verses 13 and 14, the LORD offers Cain a sign to reassure him that he is not totally abandoned.

Cain's protest in verse 13 contains a truth which Cain himself failed to discern. It is right that the punishment for sin is greater than a sinner can bear. But God has sent his Son to bear the punishment on our behalf.

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The descent into the moral and spiritual abyss continues in the rest of the chapter.

True, there is much to admire in the following generations. But even when human beings record their best achievements, the spoiling effects of sin are obvious.

Then at the end of the chapter we hear of the birth of Seth. He later became the father of Enosh. This name is derived from a root which has to do with weakness, sickness, and frailty. In giving his son this name, Seth was expressing how he felt in this fallen world.

There are two ways to understand the final part of verse 26. It could be translated *people began to call upon the name of the LORD*. But Jewish commentators understood it to mean *people ceased calling on the name of the LORD*.

I think the negative reading is perhaps to be preferred.

It seems to fit the context better. The whole direction of chapter 4 has been downwards into increasing moral evil.

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## **Section Two: 5:1-6:8**

The key phrase in this section is *and he died*.

### ***Genesis 5***

(1) How is the length of life of these early humans to be explained?

The sentence of death worked out its effects gradually.

(2) How do we account for the age of these men at parenthood?

The son named is not in every case the man's first son.

The main purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that God's warning in 2:17 was fulfilled generation after generation (cf. Romans 5:12).

Adam *fathered a son in his own likeness*. All he can do is reproduce children who will sin and die.

### **Genesis 6:1-7**

#### **1. What is meant by *the sons of God on the one hand and the daughters of men on the other*?**

There are three possibilities.

- (1) *The daughters of men* are human women, and *the sons of God* are fallen angelic beings. But Luke 20:35-36 seems to mean that angelic beings have never married.
- (2) *The daughters of men* are female descendants of Cain, and *the sons of God* are male descendants of Seth. But this presupposes that the line of Seth was godly; on my reading of 4:26, this was not so.
- (3) *The sons of God* are men of high social status. They are princes and mighty men. *The daughters of men* are human women in general. This is the reading which I favour.

#### **2. What was the great evil which called the forth the LORD's response of judgment?**

Some people draw attention to the reference to the women's attractiveness. But it is doubtful whether God would condemn this.

It is more likely that promiscuity is the problem. Verse 2 may mean (1) that each man took a number of wives, or (2) that people were not bothering to get married at all.

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The LORD's initial response is heard in verse 3.

- (1) His Spirit has been pleading with the consciences of men and women.
- (2) There are two possible ways to take it the phrase, *his days shall be 120 years*: (i) the LORD is going to allow the human race 120 more years to respond; (ii) the human lifespan is to be drastically reduced.

The Nephilim (cf. Numbers 13:33) were terrorists.

Verse 5 sums up the Biblical doctrine of the human race in its sin. Sin's evil effects are universal.

The source of the human problem is the *heart* (cf. Jeremiah 17:9).

Verse 6 tells us of the LORD's grief as he surveyed this ugly scene.

So in verse 7 the LORD determines to destroy the world.

However, the grace of God is truly amazing. Two notes of hope have been sounded in this section.

1. The reaffirmation of the creation of human beings, male and female, in the likeness of God (5:1-2).
2. The biography of Enoch (5:21-24). He lived to please God (Hebrews 11:5). He was translated to heaven without having to taste death: this is a reminder that death is not going to be allowed the last word.

### **Genesis 6:8**

This does not mean that Noah was a virtuous exception. The word *but* is contrasting God's judgment and God's favour. This speaks of undeserved goodness.

This section ends with the promise that we are going to see the grace of God working for the salvation of a hopeless world.

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### **Section Three: 6:9-9:29**

#### ***Genesis 6:9-10***

The opening words of this section explain the result of God's grace coming to Noah.

His standing before God was changed: he was *righteous* (Hebrews 11:7).

His life was transformed.

#### ***Genesis 6:11-13***

Corruption and violence were the main characteristics of the world. So the LORD determines to *make an end* of human life.

#### ***Genesis 6:14-17***

The LORD gives Noah detailed instructions about the ark which he must build, and explains why such a vessel is needed. The flood will not be some disastrous misfortune. It is the LORD's action.

There are two things which it is well to note at this point. (1) The fact of a world-wide flood is amply documented in ancient annals. (2) Noah's ark was the biggest floating vessel built before the mid nineteenth-century.

#### ***Genesis 6:18***

The word *covenant* occurs for the first time in Scripture. It is to become one of the Bible's central themes. But here it appears suddenly and without any explanation. The meaning will be filled out in Genesis 9:9-17. God's covenant is his work of saving people from the judgment which threatens them.

#### ***Genesis 6:19-21***

God's purpose in instructing Noah to make an ark is to preserve life.

#### ***Genesis 6:22***

Noah's obeyed exactly (cf. Genesis 7:5; Hebrews 11:7).

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#### ***Genesis 7:1-20***

The flood took place 1656 years after the creation of the world. This is a testimony to God's patience (cf. 1 Peter 3:20).

This was the year that Methuselah died. Perhaps he was destroyed by the waters. His death then reminds us that human life in sin cannot go on forever.

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The word *deep* in verse 11 was last used in 1:2. The earth is once again totally submerged by water.

But Noah has gone into the ark. Verse 16 tells us that *the LORD shut him in*. The ark was made secure by a divine miracle.

### **Genesis 7:21-23**

The fate of those outside the ark. This description is quite brief. By contrast, the account of Noah and his family and the animals entering the ark is long and detailed. This indicates that God's preference is always to save. The priority concern of the story of the flood is God's grace in salvation.

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### **Genesis 8**

At the end of this chapter we read that Noah *offered burnt offerings* (cf. Leviticus 1).

The main thing about the burnt offering was that the smoke ascended to the LORD. Genesis 8:21 refers to *the pleasing aroma* which ascended to the LORD from Noah's burnt offering (cf. Leviticus 1:9,13,17). It goes on to explain what this means. His raging wrath is pacified. That was the purpose of the burnt offering (cf. Ephesians 5:2).

Why could the burnt offering pacify God's anger? Leviticus 1:4 says that the Israelite who brought the animal for sacrifice had to *lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering*. In doing so he was trusting that the *it shall be accepted for him*, and that was a symbol that the offerer was *accepted before the LORD* (Leviticus 1:3).

This acceptance was possible because the burnt offering would *make atonement for him*. The Hebrew word translated *atonement* is *kaphar* (cf. Genesis 32:20).

The burnt offerings were symbols of the great present that God was going to be offered from the cross. The life of Jesus laid down in death was the present which appeased God (cf. Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2: 4:10).

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The LORD's words in Genesis 8:21 tell us that human nature has not been changed by the flood.

In verse 22, the LORD puts his abundant grace into words. He promises to maintain the sequence of seasons and provide for human need.

We might object that the regularity of nature is not quite consistent. Disasters, even floods, do still occur. What the LORD has promised is to keep flooding and other catastrophes local in extent.

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### **Genesis 9:1-17**

We come now to the fuller explanation of the covenant that God made with Noah.

**1. God's initiative in covenant-making** (verses 9,11, 12,15,17).

**2. The covenant promises** (verses 11,15; verses 9,10, 12,13,15,16).

**3. The permanence of the covenant** (verses 12,16).

**4. The sign of the covenant** (verses 12-17).

The word translated *bow* is also used for the bow used for firing arrows. The LORD has put his weapon down.

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The main purpose of the covenant with Noah was to preserve the world as the arena for salvation. But it also points beyond itself to the covenant of grace.

The LORD's words to Noah are taken up in Isaiah 54:9. The LORD will not abandon his people permanently. He will embrace them in his *covenant of peace*, which *shall never be removed*.

A rainbow points upwards. Not only has God set his bow aside. He has also turned it over so that it points back at himself.

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### ***Genesis 9:18-29***

Nothing is really different after the flood. Judgment changes nothing.

In verse 25 a curse is pronounced on Canaan, one of Ham's four sons. The curse was restricted to one branch of Ham's descendants. It was fulfilled in two ways. (1) In the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. (2) In Israel's conquest of the promised land.

What does change the heart is God's blessing. That is the message of verses 26 and 27. The prophecy that Japheth will dwell in Shem's tents is fulfilled in the uniting of Jews and Gentiles in Christ.

One way to preach on the flood is to take our cue from Jesus (Matthew 24:37-39).

Jesus points to the way that people carried on the ordinary activities of daily life as if God was irrelevant.

## **Section Four: 10:1-11:9**

The main point of this section is the huge potential for evil when sin's resources are pooled. But the LORD ensures that the damage is strictly limited.

### ***Genesis 10***

- the origin of the nations: the human family is divided into three branches.

**Verses 2-5:** the nations descended from Japheth.

**Verses 6-20:** the descendants of Ham.

**Verses 21-31:** the nations descended from Shem.

By listing the diverse nations on earth, Genesis is preparing the way for the revelation of a salvation which will bless all nations.

In verses 8-12 we have the story of Nimrod. His name means 'rebellion'. Nimrod was a rebel against the ways of the LORD. set himself up as an emperor, and became a cruel tyrant. His kingdom was centred on **Babel** (Babylon), which became a symbol for worldly power where God is disregarded.

### ***Genesis 11***

- the story of Babel continues.

Each part of chapter 10 ends with a summary which refers to the different languages spoken. Chapter 11 explains how there are so many different languages.

The building of the tower of Babel was probably Nimrod's way of establishing his rule. It represents an attack on the sovereignty of God. But this project is doomed to failure. The building materials were second rate (verse 3). The LORD could not see it without coming down out of heaven (verse 5)!

Verse 6 reveals the sinister power of unity in sin. So the LORD ends communication (verse 7) and disperses human beings (verse 8).

God's long term purpose is to reverse this confusion by the heart-changing work of the Spirit (see Zephaniah 3:9). Psalm 87 anticipates people from Babylon, as well as other Gentile nations, being included as members of God's community.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Section Five: 11:10-26**

The point of this section is to hurry on to Abram. His life was a key moment in the history that leads to Christ.

The main thing we know about the period between Shem and Abram is that it was a time of moral and spiritual decline (see Joshua 24:2,14-15).

Terah's name may be connected with the Hebrew word *yarah*, which means 'moon'. This may suggest that Abram's ancestors were involved in moon worship.

When things are that bleak that God comes in grace to Abram.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Section Six: 11:27-25:11**

#### ***Genesis 11:27-32***

##### **1. Ur of the Chaldeans**

Ur was a significant city at that time. It was important for industry, political power, education, and architecture. It was an important religious centre for the moon cult.

So Abram was an urban man, who had grown up in a setting of civilisation and culture. He was very probably well educated and highly qualified.

##### **2. Sarai's barrenness.**

Sarai is the first in a number of women in the chosen family who are initially barren. This emphasizes the miraculous nature of the preservation of the Jewish people. The purpose of their preservation was to ensure that the line leading to Christ would survive.

### **3. The removal from Ur of the Chaldeans**

Acts 7:2-4 makes it clear that the LORD's call to Abram recorded in 12:1 actually took place before Abram left Ur (cf. Genesis 15:7; Nehemiah 9:7).

Terah was persuaded to start out on the journey. He is said to have taken Abram as a mark of respect for the senior member of the family.

But the journey to Canaan is interrupted at Haran. Terah died here (verse 32).

\* \* \* \* \*

### ***Genesis 12:1-3***

These verses set the agenda for the rest of Section Six. The LORD here makes the basic promise to Abram. The clauses of this promise lay down the programme which God will pursue for the rest of Genesis, for the rest of the Bible, and for the rest of world history.

There are three strands to the LORD's promise.

#### **1. Land (verse 1)**

The LORD will show Abram a land, the promised land (Hebrews 11: 8). He will only be able to identify the land once Abram has arrived there. Abram must step out in faith.

This involved a complete break with the past, with all that was familiar. He had to leave his own land and break with the idolatry of Ur.

#### **2. Offspring (verse 2)**

The LORD next promises Abram a large offspring. The fulfillment went far beyond what Abram could imagine. It embraces all his spiritual descendants in Christ (Galatians 3:7,9,18,28; Romans 4:9,11-12).

#### **3. Blessing (verses 2-3)**

The main concern of the blessing is that the whole human race is to be caught up into God's blessing.

This promise looks to Christ, the great descendant of Abram (Galatians 3:8,13-14; Ephesians 1:3; Romans 4:6,9), who died for the sins of the whole world.

Abram's blessing included the gift of a great name. His name is great because Jesus is the greatest of all his descendants (see Philippians 2:9; Matthew 8:11).

\* \* \* \* \*

Our study of the remainder of this sixth section of Genesis will be structured around these three strands in the promise to Abram. There is a recurring theme: God's promise comes under threat, but God remains faithful, and safeguards the promise.

### **The land**

## ***Genesis 12***

The LORD's promise of this land is recorded immediately after the statement that the Canaanites were then there (12:6-7). (1) This shows that for Abram to inherit the land would involve a dramatic divine intervention. (2) It also demonstrates that faith has to be the governing factor in Abram's walk with the LORD.

The improbability that God's promise can be fulfilled runs through this section. The presence of the Canaanites is the first in a series of obstacles. But the LORD's determination to surmount every difficulty is held before us constantly.

The next ominous note is sounded in verse 10. Having been brought to the land, Abram now feels constrained to leave it because of famine. The experience in Egypt suggests that this may not have been the right thing to do.

## ***Genesis 13***

Abram is back in the land. But now a new problem arises. The land is overcrowded (verses 2-7).

Abram risks giving the promised land away (verse 9). But he did remain in the land (verse 12), and the LORD confirms the promise (verses 14-15,17).

## ***Genesis 14***

Melchizedek blesses Abram in the name of ***God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth*** (verse 19), and Abram repeats this description of the LORD (verse 22). Because the LORD possesses the whole earth, he is entitled to give any particular land to anyone he chooses.

## ***Genesis 15***

A fourth difficulty now arises in the way of Abram inheriting the land – Abram's wavering faith (verse 8). The LORD replies by repeating the promise yet again (verses 18-21).

Verse 18 contains the first reference to the LORD's covenant in the history of Abram. But it casts it light back into the preceding chapters. The nature of God's promise in Genesis 12:1-3 is covenantal.

In between Abram's question in verse 8 and the LORD's answer in verse 18 a dramatic event takes place. God instructs Abram to fetch three animals and two birds, cut the animals in two and put the two pieces opposite each other along with the two birds, making two lines of four pieces, with a gap down the middle.

God then put Abram to sleep, stressing that what is about to happen must be his work alone.

Next ***a smoking firepot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces*** (verse 17). And it was ***on that day*** that ***the LORD made a covenant with Abram***.

The animals that died were amongst those which later Old Testament law would require for sacrifice. So it was on the very day when a sacrifice was offered that the covenant was made. Any covenant which God makes with sinful human beings must be established in sacrifice. Atonement must be made for sin if a covenant relationship is to be possible.

The firepot and torch passing between the pieces is the real answer to Abram's question in verse 8. The drama is a symbolic statement that God's own commitment will secure the fulfillment of his promise to give Abram this land.

The firepot and torch is a symbol of God. God passed between the pieces. And only God did so.

Jeremiah 34:8-22 helps us understand what it meant to pass between the pieces. To pass between the pieces was to place themselves under the sentence of death if they should fail to fulfil their commitment.

Here God passed between the pieces. He is threatening his own judgment and destruction if he should fail to keep his word. This is really a way of saying that the LORD cannot possibly fail to maintain his covenant commitment. He will certainly give Abram the land.

Verse 16 reminds us that the LORD is very patient.

### ***Genesis 17***

In verse 8, the LORD again repeats his promise of the land. Two things call for our attention here.

(1) The LORD speaks of the land as ***an everlasting possession***. This points to the larger vision in view in connection with the land. The vision of faith, which looks out in every direction beyond Canaan itself to the ends of the earth, is fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ.

(2) The LORD adds, ***I will be their God***. This is the overarching goal of the covenant. The land is especially the place where the experience of being the people of God will be lived out. (cf. Jeremiah 24:6-7; 31:23,33-34; 32:37-41; Ezekiel 11:17-20; 37:21-27; Zechariah 8: 7-8; Hebrews 11:14-15 are set in the context of the account of the faith of Abraham.

### ***Genesis 18-19***

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is the first instalment of the LORD's purification of the land ready for the coming of his people.

In his prayer Abraham acknowledges the LORD as ***the Judge of all the earth***, who therefore has rights over this particular land (18:25).

The sin of Sodom was such as cried out for judgment. (cf. Jeremiah 23:14; Jude 7; Ezekiel 16:49-50). But the sin of rejecting the gospel is worse (Matthew 11:23-24).

The angels escorted Lot out of Sodom (cf. 2 Peter 2:6-7). But his wife still longed for the godlessness of Sodom (cf. Luke 17:28-33).

The sunrise (19:23) is symbolic of a new dawn for the land. The land has been purged. It has been refined as by fire (19:28).

### ***Genesis 23***

Sarah died ***in the land*** (verse 2). Her death becomes the occasion for Abraham to purchase the one piece of land which he ever owned in the land. This became the regular burial place for Abraham's descendants (Acts 7:15-16).

The burial of Sarah in the land was Abraham's affirmation of faith. He was declaring that he accepted that this land would be his in due time.

### ***Genesis 24***

A wife for Abraham's son is brought to the land.

We need to take note of Abraham's words *the LORD ... swore to me* (verse 7). The LORD committed himself on oath to give Abraham the promised land. (cf. Exodus 6:8; 32:13; 33:1; Deuteronomy 1:8; 6:10-12; 34:4).

Hebrews 6:13-17 explains the significance of the LORD's oath. God's oath is his guarantee.

From Micah 7:20 and Luke 1:73 we learn that the land was the place where the LORD would display his steadfast love to Abraham's people, and they in return would offer him fearless and holy service. The land and the love were pledged on oath. The land is symbolic of that relationship.

Psalms 105:42-45 draws out a twofold significance in the land. It represents both the joy of God's people in their salvation, and their grateful obedience to the God who has saved them.

### *Genesis 25*

Abraham sent the sons of his concubines away (verse 6). The land of promise must be kept clear for Isaac. Then Abraham died. He is buried in the land (verses 9-10).

## **The Offspring**

### *Genesis 12*

Here the LORD uses the actual term *offspring* for the first time in his words to Abram (verse 7). But Abram was already seventy-five years old (verse 4). And Sarai is only ten years younger (17:7). This piece is important for the developing story of the offspring.

The next few chapters show us Abram's struggle to believe God's apparently impossible promise.

### *Genesis 13*

In verses 15-16 the LORD makes explicit the greatness of this promise. This is the first of three comparisons which the LORD uses to indicate the enormous size of Abram's offspring: the number of Abram's descendants will be as great as the number of particles of dust on the earth.

### *Genesis 15*

Several years have passed, and Abram is struggling to hold on to the promise (verses 2-3). He fears that it will soon be too late for God to fulfil the promise. And his estate will be inherited by his senior servant. And he is a foreigner!

Now for the second time the LORD informs Abram of the amazing numbers that his offspring will attain (verses 4-5). Not only will they be as many as the particles of dust on earth. They will also outnumber the stars of heaven.

As Abram heard the word of the LORD, *he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness* (verse 6). This verse proclaims the truth of justification by faith. This truth lies at the heart of God's dealings with his people.

Calvin says that we must not limit this text to mean that Abram was counted righteous merely for believing that his offspring would be numerous. Rather, the faith through which Abram was justified looked to the whole promise. Calvin also points out that all God's promises flow out of his free love. So to say that Abram was justified because he looked to the whole of God's promise really means that he was justified because he embraced the God who is love.

Genesis 15:6 is taken up several times in the New Testament. Paul cites it in Galatians 3:5-6 as evidence that God's dealings with his people is always on the basis of hearing with faith.

In Romans 4:3 Paul quotes this text. He then gives us a definition of faith (verses 21-22). True faith is a trusting response to God's word. Paul then points out that Genesis 15:6 has wider application (verses 23-25).

When we respond to God's word with faith, God credits righteousness. Righteousness is a spiritual and moral standing which is acceptable to God. It is to be declared not guilty of any sin in God's sight. It is to be seen by God as perfectly good. Abram was not righteous in himself. But because he believed God's word, God in grace accepted as equivalent to righteousness the faith with which Abram responded to his word. And Abram is the model for God's dealings with all his people.

In the light of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ we recognize that true faith believes in him. Jesus Christ the righteous has been punished for our unrighteousness. Because of him, as we believe the word of his gospel, we are cleared of the guilt of that unrighteousness in the eyes of God.

Twice more in Genesis 15, God refers to the offspring promised to Abram (verses 13,18).

### ***Genesis 16-17***

Sarai is now beginning to feel that it is too late for the promise to be fulfilled through her. She is now 75. So she suggests that Abram marry Hagar. Abram does so, and Hagar conceives (16:1-4). Nine months later, Ishmael is born (16:15).

Is this the fulfilment of God's word? Abram and Sarai have tried to help God fulfil his promise. But what happened?

We must read without a break the last verse of Genesis 16 (verse 16) and verse 1 of chapter 17: ***Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram.***

When Abram tried to help God to keep his promise the result was thirteen years of silence from heaven. Abram must learn that God alone will accept responsibility for keeping the promise.

Paul refers to this incident in Galatians 4:22-25.

When LORD breaks his silence it is to restate his covenant to Abram. He tells Abram that he will multiply him greatly, and that Abram will be ***the father of a multitude of nations*** (17:2,4). The LORD is predicting the ingathering in Christ of the Gentile nations.

The LORD now changes Abram's name to Abraham. The reason is that Abraham is to be the father of a multitude of nations, and that nations and kings will come from him (17:5-6). The word offspring comes five times in 17:7-10.

Circumcision is now mentioned for the first time (17:10-14). It is a sign of the covenant (cf. Acts 7:8). Abraham obeys. He and his household are circumcised (17:23-26).

Circumcision is very suitable as a sign of the covenant in two ways.

(1) Circumcision is ***an everlasting covenant*** (verse 13). And circumcision is an irreversible operation.

(2) The male child was to be circumcised at the age of eight days. This emphasizes that membership of the covenant community is something in which God takes the initiative and makes the choice.

Circumcision was also a symbol of a spiritual and moral reality (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:25-29; 4:11; Philippians 3:3; Colossians 2:11).

The LORD also changes Sarai's name to Sarah. He explains: ***I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her*** (17:15-16). Abraham is still struggling to believe that God can do this (17:17).

Abraham then pleads for Ishmael (17:18). Perhaps he has been assuming for the past 13 years that Ishmael was the fulfillment of God's promise. But the only answer which Abraham's suggestion gets is ***No*** (17:19). God alone will give the promised offspring, and he will do it through Sarah. Sarah's son Isaac will also have offspring, and they will inherit the covenant (17:19-21).

### ***Genesis 18-19***

This promise is repeated in 18:10. We are then reminded of the age of Abraham and Sarah. Sarah laughs. But the LORD challenges her: ***Is anything too hard for the LORD?*** Then he repeats the promise (18:11-14).

### ***Genesis 20***

Once again, Abraham pretends that Sarah is his sister. This was serious because it was putting the promise of offspring at risk.

### ***Genesis 21***

But the LORD kept his promise. The LORD is faithful to his word.

On ***the day when Isaac was weaned*** Ishmael was caught mocking Isaac. Sarah asked Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. The LORD confirms that Abraham should do so, and says: ***through Isaac shall your offspring be named*** (verses 8-12).

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9:7. He is pointing out that mere ethnic descent from Abraham does not qualify a Jew for being a true member of the people of God.

This is a theme which figured prominently in Jesus' own controversies with the Jewish leaders (cf. John 8:33-40). Jesus' point is that the true offspring of Abraham are those who share Abraham's faith (see also Matthew 3:9; Galatians 3:29; Romans 4:13,16).

But this does not mean that God has rejected the Jews altogether (Jeremiah 33:25-26; cf. Luke 19:9; Luke 13:16; Acts 13:26; Romans 11:1; 2 Corinthians 11:22).

### ***Genesis 22***

God's instruction in verses 1-2 must have seemed strange: all God's favour was bound up in the promise of Isaac. Were all the hopes invested in him now to come to nothing? But see Hebrews 11:17-19.

As Abraham and Isaac left their servants, Abraham said: ***I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you*** (verse 5). These are words of faith.

Isaac asked his father, ***where is the lamb?*** Abraham's reply is prophetic: ***God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering*** (verses 7-8; cf. John 1:29).

As Abraham was about to kill Isaac, an angel intervened. Abraham has passed the test (cf. James 2:21-24).

James' point is that an empty profession of faith is not recognized by God as true faith. Because Abram was counted righteous by faith in Genesis 15:6, he was willing to obey the word of the LORD in Genesis 22.

In verse 13 we find one of the Bible's lovely pictures of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The life of a ram was offered instead of Isaac. So Isaac survived. God's only Son was offered instead of us. So we survive. In the death of the ram instead of Isaac we see the truth of substitution vividly portrayed (cf. Romans 8:32). The crucifixion of Jesus took place very close to this spot (2 Chronicles 3:1).

We now have a third metaphor to emphasize the stupendous numbers of Abraham's offspring (verse 17).

Christ is the true fulfilment of the LORD's promise of offspring to Abraham (Galatians 3:16). It is in him that all who believe, Jew and Gentile, become Abraham's offspring.

## **Blessing**

### ***Genesis 17:5,15-16***

For Abram's name to be made great is part of his being a blessing to the world. In explaining the change in Abram's name, the LORD says, *your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations* (17:5). His spiritual children in Christ are to be drawn from all nations.

As he changes Sarai's name the LORD again stresses the connection between the great name and the blessing which will extend to the whole world (17:15-16).

### ***Genesis 14:19***

The first fulfillment of the promise of blessing comes in 14:19, where Melchizedek blesses Abram. Melchizedek is next mentioned in Psalm 110:4: The priest *after the order of Melchizedek* is Christ.

Psalm 110 is quoted in Hebrews 5:6. Hebrews 5:9-10 explain that this means that Christ *became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him*.

As the source of eternal salvation Jesus prepares the way to heaven for all his followers (Hebrews 6:18-20).

Hebrews 7:1-4 depicts Melchizedek as a type of Jesus. There have been those who have thought that Melchizedek was the Son of God. Others think that the word *resembling* in Hebrews 7:3 rules out this identification. He is simply a type of Christ.

Hebrews 7:5-27 tells us that the work that Christ does as exemplified by Melchizedek is to bring *perfection* to his people. And to be perfected means to draw near to God.

Hebrews 10 helps us to understand why Christ's priesthood genuinely brings us near to God: our sins are forgiven.

Melchizedek pronounced God's blessing on Abram. Paul connects blessing and forgiveness (Romans 4:7-8).

This is where the blessing of the nations begins. Christ's sacrifice is so perfect that it atones for the sins of the whole world.

### ***Genesis 18:17-18***

This is the next mention of the blessing of Abraham. By informing Abraham of the conditions in Sodom, the LORD is inviting Abraham to intercede for the city. One way in which Abraham is a blessing to the world is through prayer.

## **Genesis 22:17-18**

The LORD repeats the promise of blessing through Abraham and his offspring to the earth immediately after he has passed the test of his faith.

## **Genesis 24:1,35,60**

Towards the end of Abraham's life we learn that *the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things*. Abraham's servant later confirms that this is so. Rebekah's family pray that the blessing may be fulfilled in her.

## **Genesis 25:11**

"The blessing of Abraham did not die with him, but survived to all the children of the promise" (Matthew Henry).

Jesus once said, *Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad* (John 8:56). In what sense did Abraham see the day of Christ? Perhaps in two ways.

- (1) Jesus may mean that every period of history is his day.
- (2) Jesus may mean that Abraham saw by faith that God's promises would be fulfilled in a future day when the LORD himself would come as the Saviour of his people.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Section Seven: 25:12-18**

This is a brief section because it is not dealing with the main line of descent from Abraham to Christ. Ishmael's sons are listed. Verse 16 draws attention to the fact that they were *twelve princes according to their tribes* (cf. 17:20). They did indeed become a great nation. And their territory was large (verse 18).

- (1) Ishmael's descendants were secure in their land.
- (2) *Havilah* was last mentioned as a place name in 2:11, as part of the Garden of Eden. Because of God's blessing, life for the Ishmaelites was as near to paradise as was possible in this fallen world.

So the experience of Ishmael's sons is an illustration of the goodness of God towards those who are not numbered amongst his people.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Section Eight: 25:19-35:29**

In this section the covenant promise is quoted seven times: 26:3-4; 26:24; 27:27-29; 28:3-4; 28:13-14; 32:12; 35:11-.

All three comparisons which the LORD gave to Abraham to emphasize the size of his offspring are repeated in this section: 13:16 cf. 28:14; 15:5 and 22:17 cf. 26:4; 22:17 cf. 32:12.

These seven quotations of the promise divide this section into eight subsections. The theme that runs through is the LORD's determination to fulfil his promise against everything that threatens it.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **1) 25:19-34**

This section opens with a threat to the promise: Rebekah *was barren* (verse 21). What, then, will become of the promise of offspring?

Rebekah's barrenness is eventually overcome in response to Isaac's prayer. He had to persist in prayer for twenty years (verses 20,26).

Twins are conceived. Before they were born, it was prophesied that *the older shall serve the younger* (verse 23). The LORD is setting his choice on Jacob as the brother whose offspring will eventually lead to the Christ (see Malachi 1:2-3). The apostle Paul finds in these words evidence for the sovereignty of God in salvation (Romans 9:10-16).

As the twins are born the younger twin's hand is *holding Esau's heel* (verse 26; cf. Hosea 12:3). The name *Jacob* is derived from the word for *heel*.

Esau returned home one day to discover that *Jacob was cooking stew*. Esau asked for some. Jacob said, *Sell me your birthright*. Esau made the birthright over to Jacob (verses 29-34). Hebrews 12:16 refers to this incident.

## 2) 26:1-22

The issue of immediate concern here is the land. The land has been hit by famine (verse 1). So Isaac moves to Gerar. The LORD tells him not to abandon the land of promise (verses 2-3).

Then the LORD speaks the word of promise aspects (verses 3-5). Two things stand out here.

- (1) The promise is prefaced by the LORD's commitment to be with Isaac: the relational element comes first.
- (2) The oath sworn to Abraham is the basis for the reaffirmation of the promise to Isaac. Abraham is the representative head of the covenant people.

So Isaac remains in the land (verse 6). But, like his father, he pretends that his wife is his sister, and is rebuked by Abimelech (verses 6-11).

The remainder of the passage reports how Isaac was blessed in the land (see especially verses 12 and 22).

However, there is a challenge to Isaac's faith in the process (see verses 15 and 18-22).

Isaac found room in the land, and the room was bound up with wells. This indicates that the land is symbolic of the eternal life with its unquenchable satisfaction that Jesus brings from the wells of salvation.

## 3) 26:23-35

The LORD repeats the promise to Isaac (verse 24). The two aspects of the promise which are mentioned are the blessing and the offspring.

The passage illustrates how the nations are blessed in Abraham's offspring. The fact that Isaac is being blessed by the LORD is obvious to Abimelech, so he wants to benefit from Isaac's blessing. He wants peace with Isaac. And so his nation is blessed, at least in a measure (verses 26-31).

## 4) 27:1-40

In this passage again the blessing and the offspring come together: the offspring is to be the inheritor of the blessing. These verses are concerned with the passing on of the blessing to the offspring of the next generation.

Isaac acts foolishly. He tries to redirect the LORD's purposes along the line of descent through Esau rather than Jacob. However, God's providence overrules.

Verse 4 alerts us to the fact that this story concerns the blessing. The words *bless* and *blessing* occur at regular intervals throughout the chapter (verses 7, 10, 12, 19, 23, 25).

Verses 27-29 quote the words of Isaac's blessing in full. The blessing includes fruitfulness in the land. The land is the sphere in which the blessing is realised. The blessing then speaks of the blessing of the nations through Jacob. This blessing is fulfilled in Christ.

From the content of this blessing it is clear that Isaac is passing on the covenant promise. And yet the wording falls short of the full terms of the promise. The reason may be that Isaac intended to give the blessing to Esau contrary to God's purpose.

The words 'bless' and 'blessing' continue to recur (verses 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 38). The words at the end of verse 33 show that Isaac knew that this was the LORD's blessing which he was conferring. If it had been just his own words, he could have cancelled the blessing. Isaac's violent trembling was the result of having to face up to his attempt to outwit God.

Esau knows he cannot be blessed. So he weeps with anguish. Hebrews 12:16-17 refers to this. It is saying that he could not make what he had already done not happen. Having sold the birthright he had forfeited the right to the blessing. And nothing could undo that.

There are three other comments worth making on this story.

(1) Notice how close to blasphemy Jacob comes in verse 20.

(2) By using the title 'firstborn' in verse 32, Esau is being deceitful. Having sold the birthright, Esau could no longer legitimately claim the other.

(3) In verse 36 Esau observes that Jacob's name reveals his nature.

Hebrews 11:20 discerns Isaac's faith in the blessing of Jacob.

The overriding message of this passage is that the LORD will achieve his purposes. Nothing that sinful people may do will prevent that. And since the blessing is fundamentally tied up with Jesus Christ, we are reminded that the LORD allowed nothing to frustrate his purpose to send a Saviour.

## **5) 27:41-28:9**

Rebekah's concern now is the preservation of the offspring who is to carry the promise on to subsequent generations.

As Isaac sends Jacob away, he passes on the promise, this time more fully and more accurately (28:3-4).

## **6) 28:10-32:2**

On his way to Haran Jacob has a dream at his stopping place one night. Now for the first time, the LORD speaks personally to Jacob. This might be described as Jacob's conversion. It is a wonderful illustration of the form that every conversion takes. It occurred at God's initiative.

The words of the LORD's promise here repeat all three strands of the covenant with Abraham. The promise looks on to Christ. The LORD commits himself to preserve the offspring of Jacob so that Christ will come. The place of their preservation will be the land. That is why it is important that the LORD guarantees to Jacob a safe return to the land.

The LORD also spells out the fundamental basis of the covenant in the relationship between the LORD and his people.

The LORD here assures Jacob in the words, *I am with you* (cf. Genesis 26:24; Isaiah 41:10; Jeremiah 15:20; Matthew 28:20).

Notice Hosea's comment on this meeting which Jacob had with the LORD (Hosea 12:4). The words which Jacob heard were intended for his offspring throughout the centuries.

The dream which precedes the words of promise assures Jacob of the LORD's protection (cf. Psalm 91:11). The ladder is a symbol of Christ (John 1:51).

Jacob's response to the vision of God is to accept the LORD as his own God at last (28:20-21).

Genesis 29:31-30:24 gives an account of the birth of Jacob's first eleven sons and his daughter, Dinah.

Initially, Leah bears four sons. The names which she gives them reflect her own allegiance to the LORD, and her struggle to accept his providence as she craves real love from her husband. As her fourth son is born (29:35) she ceases to be preoccupied with her own trial. She rests in the LORD whom she knows. This time she will praise him for his intrinsic worth, whatever the cruelties of her situation.

It is appropriate that it should be at this point that Leah's faith in the LORD comes to full expression. Judah is the son whom God has chosen to be the direct ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although Jacob preferred Rachel, she constantly appears to be less committed to the LORD than Leah.

Rachel records the birth of Joseph with two exclamations (30:23-24). Although she mentions God, Rachel is more concerned with her own standing than with him. Even when she uses the name of the LORD she is more concerned for what he could do for her, than with his own intrinsic right to praise and gratitude.

The account of the births of these eleven sons demonstrates the faithfulness of the LORD. He has promised offspring. He has been true to his word (Acts 7:8).

Jacob's desire now is to take the promised offspring into the promised land (30:25). However, Laban is reluctant. His reason is important (30:27). Here the third aspect of the promise comes to the fore. In Jacob, already, others are being blessed. The LORD's blessing on Jacob is summed up in 30:43.

Now it really is time to return to the land (31:3,13).

In 31:19 and 34-35 we have another hint at the sorry state that Rachel is in spiritually: Rachel cannot bear to be parted from the idols of Mesopotamia. She does not truly know the LORD.

In 32:1-2 Jacob is on the way back to the land. The offspring are with him. As he sets out on his journey he receives an intimation that the blessing of God is truly upon him.

This subsection began with the LORD's promise to Jacob of his unfailing presence (28:15). Now at the end of the subsection Jacob receives confirmation that the LORD has been with him right through. So in the closing verses of this subsection all three strands of the promise are drawn together.

## 7) 32:3-33:20

The aspects of the promise prominent in this subsection are the blessing and the land. The centre of this passage is the wrestle between the LORD and Jacob. It results in the change of Jacob's name and a blessing. The passage ends with evidence that Jacob is blessed so that others may be blessed through him, and with Jacob back in the land.

Jacob's prayer (32:9-12) is the first recorded prayer in the Bible. Jacob refers back here to the message which he received from the LORD in Genesis 31:3. and to the LORD's words to Abraham in Genesis 22:17.

As he prays, Jacob acknowledges the LORD's kindness and his own unworthiness. He has a sound grasp of the Biblical gospel: free grace, unmerited favour; goodness quite contrary to what might be expected. Despite Jacob's waywardness, the LORD has proved faithful. As Jacob looks back, his heart rises in wondering worship.

Jacob then lays his anxiety before God, and pleads God's promise first given to Abraham.

Jacob now prepares *a present for his brother Esau* (32:13). His motive is indicated: *I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me* (32:20).

Those words are helpful for our understanding of the doctrine of atonement. The Hebrew word translated *appease* is the regular Old Testament word for atonement. This is its first occurrence in the Bible. As Jacob's present is intended to appease Esau, so the offering of the body of Christ on the cross is a present to appease God. To appease someone is to pacify their anger and turn their hostility to acceptance. God is angry with sinners. Because of the offering of Christ he ceases to be hostile to us, and accepts us in grace and mercy.

But there is one vital difference. The present sent to Esau was entirely Jacob's initiative. It is not on our initiative that Christ is presented to God for his appeasement. God himself arranged for the offering to be made (1 John 4:14).

At this point an interesting event occurred (32:24-29). A change of name is linked with the promise of blessing. The association is clear here. Jacob's name is changed, and then he is blessed. Jacob's name proved to be descriptive of his character (Genesis 27:36).

As this man asks Jacob his name, Jacob is compelled to confess his character. But the name change is a declaration that he is to be made new by the transforming power of God's grace.

The meaning of the new name, Israel, is defined by the words which follow: *you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.*

But how did Jacob strive and prevail with God? *The man* in this wrestling match represents God (32:30). The bout of wrestling took place at God's initiative. Jacob is not attempting to wrestle anything out of the LORD. The LORD is wrestling with Jacob.

The Hebrew verb translated *wrestled* is 'abaq. When the same word is used as a noun it means 'dust' (eg. Exodus 9:8-9).

To wrestle is to try to pull someone down to the dust. That is the LORD's aim here. He wants Jacob to reach the point where he can echo the words of Abraham in Genesis 18:27, *I who am but dust and ashes.* For much of his life Jacob has been full of self-confidence. Now the LORD wants to wrestle out of him that sense of self-sufficiency. He wants to bring Jacob down to the dust.

However, Jacob resists the LORD's humbling work. But, as dawn breaks, *the man touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint. The man* then asks Jacob to let him go because Jacob is now holding on to *the man*. If he lets go, he will fall to the ground. He will be literally in the dust. He is unable to stand unsupported because of his dislocated hip joint.

At this point Jacob asks for a blessing. But first he must confess his true character. He must acknowledge that he is but dust and ashes. *The man* then changes Jacob's name and blesses him.

It was at the moment when Jacob began to cling on to God that he prevailed with him. Hosea 12:3-4 clarifies what it meant for Jacob to prevail: it was not when he was resisting the angel's dealings with him, but when he was brought to the point of seeking the LORD's favour with tears. He prevailed when he became the broken man, humbled to the dust (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

The text defines the name *Israel* as *you have striven with God ..., and have prevailed*. Its literal meaning would be 'God prevails'. We need to take those two things together. It is only as God prevails in a person's life that that person prevails.

As Jacob limped away from the scene of the wrestling match *the sun rose upon him* (32:31). This symbolizes the blessing received. Jacob has experienced the LORD's healing in his soul, even as he has been damaged in his body. He leaps inwardly, but limps outwardly.

Now it is time for Jacob to meet Esau. His welcome must have been beyond his wildest dreams (33:4; cf. Luke 15:20).

Jacob persuades Esau to accept the present, which he describes as *my blessing that is brought to you* (33:11). In sharing with Esau some of the wealth which the LORD has graciously given to him, Jacob is again seeing a small token of the fulfilment of the promise that through him all the world will be blessed.

Esau returns home, and Jacob settles at Shechem, which is *in the land of Canaan* (33:18). Jacob buys a piece of land (33:19). He now owns a plot of ground within the boundaries of the promised land. This piece of land is in the same vicinity as the burial plot which Abraham had bought earlier (see Joshua 24:32 and Acts 7:15-16). This was a pledge that the entire land would belong to his offspring in due course. The slight increase in the amount of land in the possession of the offspring of Abraham was a token of the fact that the LORD would eventually enlarge their borders to take in the entire land.

\* \* \* \* \*

Chapter 34 has a direct bearing on the main theme. All three elements in the LORD's covenant promise are in the background. All three are under threat.

### ***1. Notice the threat to the promise of the land***

The word *land* is found six times in this chapter (verses 1, 2, 10, 21 [twice], 30).

Two dangers arise relating to the land:

(1) that the land will not be the exclusive possession of Israel as God has promised.

(2) that *the inhabitants of the land* might drive Jacob out if they find him obnoxious.

### ***2. Notice the threat to the promise of offspring***

The Hivites' proposal is intermarriage with a view to the unification of the two peoples. Israel is being lured into accepting an arrangement which would compromise their integrity and distinctiveness as a people and to corrupt the offspring of Israel.

For Jacob's generation to agree to intermarry with the Canaanites would render impossible the coming of Jesus Christ as the true offspring of Israel, as the Saviour of the world.

### ***3. Notice the threat to the promise of blessing***

The promise is that the offspring of Abraham should be a blessing to the world. Here the Hivites want to secure that blessing for themselves alone. They are also enticing the sons of Jacob to become focussed only on themselves, and to forget that in the offspring of Abraham all nations are to be blessed.

Again, Hamor and Shechem anticipate being able to siphon off the wealth of Israel and make it their own (verse 23). However, part of what is involved in the offspring of Abraham becoming a blessing to the world is that *the wealth of the nations* come to them (Isaiah 60:5).

For the nations to be blessed is that they gladly bring their offerings of faith and worship and love and service to Christ. But in the invitation of the Hivites the flow is in the wrong direction.

\* \* \* \* \*

This chapter again reminds us that it is God alone who secures the fulfilment of his promise. Left to human beings, things go wrong. But we have the great assurance that God's purpose to save sinners in Christ shall not fail.

### **8) 35:1-29**

The final subsection of this section begins with God calling Jacob back to Bethel, where he had been converted. To return to Bethel would be the final demonstration of the faithfulness of God.

The first strand of the promise which figures here is the offspring (verse 5). The LORD ensures that the offspring is preserved.

In verse 6 the land is mentioned. The reference to Canaan calls attention again to the fact that Jacob has returned to the land of promise. It is a token of God's faithfulness.

Then we hear again of the blessing (verse 9). And the repetition of the change of name (verse 10) is a further confirmation that Jacob is indeed the carrier of the blessing.

\* \* \* \* \*

In verses 11 and 12, the LORD again confirms the promise to Jacob, this time highlighting the two strands of the offspring and the land.

Verses 16 to 26 focus again on the promise of the offspring. They concern the completion of the twelve tribes. The twelfth son, Benjamin is born, and then all twelve of Jacob's sons are listed. The birth of the twelfth son is a further pledge of the faithfulness of God.

However, the birth of the final son occurred in the midst of tragedy and grief. Rachel died in giving birth to Benjamin. She was buried near Bethlehem (verses 19-20). In God's providence, Rachel's burial place became in Christ the place where true life, eternal life, entered the world (Micah 5:2).

On two later occasions, Rachel's grief was seen as symbolic of the grief of others in this same vicinity (Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:16).

In the middle of the passage about the completion of the offspring a sordid incident is recorded (verse 22). It is recorded here to demonstrate that it is only the grace of God that has chosen this family to be the bearer of the promise to the world.

In verse 27 *Jacob came to his father Isaac* (cf. Genesis 28:21). Here is another evidence of the LORD's unfailing faithfulness.

As Section Six ended with the death of Abraham, so Section Eight ends with the death of Isaac.

### **Section Nine: 36:1-8**

The LORD is here securing the land for his people (verse 6).

### **Section Ten: 36:9-43**

Whereas section Nine was concerned mainly with the land, the main focus of Section Ten is the offspring. This section shows that Esau's tribes became powerful and influential. Chiefs and kings emerged from them.

The key verse is verse 31. Its last phrase looks forward to a day when a king will reign *over the Israelites*. So it looks forward through the line of David to Jesus Christ. Both Abraham and Jacob were informed that they were to be the ancestors of kings (Genesis 17:6,16; 35:11).

But there are kings elsewhere *before any king reigned over the Israelites*. The LORD did not always fulfil his promises immediately. He called for faith.

### **Section Eleven: 37:1-50:26**

The Bible recounts the story of Joseph in some detail on two later occasions (Psalm 105:16-23; Acts 7:9-16).

In Section Eleven all three strands of the promise are present in a subtle way. The overall impact is to assert yet again the astonishing grace of an amazingly faithful God in the face of the most despicable of crimes on the part of his undeserving people.

In this section the covenant promise is repeated several times (46:2-4; 48:3-4,21). We shall use the three elements in the covenant promise to structure our study of this final section.

#### **1. The land**

Joseph says to the butler in prison, *I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews* (40:15). This is a remarkable statement of faith. Joseph expresses the confidence that God has allocated the land to the Hebrews.

Three texts speaks of famine in the land of Canaan (42:5; 43:1; 47:4). The phrase *the land of Canaan* occurs quite frequently in this section (42:7,13,29,32; 44:8; 45:17-18,25; 46:6,12,31; 47:1,13-15; 48:7,29-30; 50:5,13). This reminds the readers that Canaan is where this family is destined to belong. Genesis will end with the entire family resident in Egypt. But we are not allowed to forget that they will not remain there indefinitely.

Connected with the theme of the land is a reference Jacob makes to being a sojourner (47:8-9). This word has been used four times already in the book of Genesis (17:8; 28:4; 36:7; 37:1).

In all four contexts the reference is to sojourning within the land. It draws attention to the fact that the land was not yet in the possession of the Israelites. But when Jacob uses the same word in his conversation with

Pharaoh he regards his entire life as a sojourn in this world (cf. 1 Chronicles 29:15; Psalms 39:12-13; 119:19; Hebrews 11:9-10,13; 13:4).

The land is a token of the heavenly dwelling place prepared in glory for all the people of God.

Although they are only sojourners, it matters to both Jacob and Joseph that they should be buried in the land of Canaan (47:29-30; cf. 50:24-25; Hebrews 11:22).

Later texts record the compliance of Israel with Joseph's request (Exodus 13:19; Joshua 24:32).

Jacob and Joseph wanted to be buried in the land as a sign of their trust in God's faithfulness. And at that time, it had to be an act of faith (50:11).

The need to be buried in the land also shows that the hope of resurrection was present to the minds of Jacob and Joseph.

## 2. The offspring

One of the main emphases in this section is that Joseph was sent to Egypt by God in order to preserve the promised offspring. The promise of the offspring finds its completion in Christ. If Jacob's entire family had perished in the famine, the salvation of the world in Christ would have been in jeopardy. So the LORD sent Joseph ahead to provide for the survival of the chosen people (45:5-8).

The word *offspring* appears twice in Genesis 46:6-7. Egypt has been prepared by the LORD as the place where the offspring will be kept safe for the time being. The true offspring, the Christ, must come at the appointed time. So the offspring amongst whom are his ancestors must not be permitted to die in the famine.

The word *offspring* reappears in 48:11. Jacob lays hands on Joseph's offspring. He deliberately confers the greater honour on Ephraim, the younger son. This is a prophetic action (verse 19)

The chief point of this section is repeated in 50:19-21. Through all that has happened God has kept alive the promised offspring.

## 3. The blessing

The main purpose of this element in the promise was that blessing should reach the world through Abraham's offspring. Ultimately, that is talking about the salvation of people of every nation in Christ. But we see some preliminary fulfilments of this strand of the promise in the experience of Joseph (see Genesis 39:5,23; 47:7,10).

In chapters 48 and 49 'blessing' terms occur fifteen times. In 48:3 Jacob recalls how God *blessed* him at Luz. He then passes on the promised blessing to the next generations in the persons of Ephraim and Manasseh (48:9,15-16,20).

Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh was in fact the transfer of the rights of the firstborn from Reuben to Joseph (cf. 1 Chronicles 5:1).

To commemorate the transfer of the birthright, Jacob bequeathed some land to Joseph (Genesis 48:22). John 4:5 tells us that Sychar, or Shechem, was *near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph*. Shechem was close to the burial plot bought by Abraham. Jacob evidently extended the possessions of the family in the land on two occasions. But each time it was to enlarge the single area which formed their inheritance.

Chapter 49 contains Jacob's final blessing of his twelve sons in their capacity as the heads of the twelve tribes (verse 28).

The first tribe to receive its blessing is Reuben. Jacob confirms to them that Reuben has been removed from the position of firstborn (verses 3-4).

In the blessings, the term 'blessing' itself is used only in that portion of the chapter which relates to Joseph. In the words addressed to Joseph blessing terminology comes six times in the space of a few lines.

However, the greatest blessing in this chapter is reserved for Judah. 1 Chronicles 5 2 notes that, although *the birthright belonged to Joseph*, it was not Joseph, but Judah, from whose tribe David came, the ancestor of the chosen line of kings (cf. Psalm 78:67-68,70-71).

The choice of David from the tribe of Judah leads us eventually to Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:14). And Genesis 49:10 is a clear prophecy of his coming. He is the king from whom the sceptre of authority will never depart (Revelation 5:5).

The third line of verse 10 is difficult. The English Standard Version translates it *until tribute comes to him* is one of only four possible renderings. However, I prefer the alternative translation, 'until he comes to whom it belongs'. 'It' in that statement would refer back to the sceptre, the ruler's staff. This line would then be looking forward beyond the reign of the Davidic monarchy to an even greater king, to Jesus Christ.

Evidence in support of this possible meaning is found in Ezekiel 21:26-27.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is one last thing that I want to look at before we finish our studies of Genesis completely. It is the role of Judah as the *pledge* (43:9; 44:32).

The meaning of the word *pledge* is defined by what Judah goes on to say in 44:33: Judah is volunteering to take Benjamin's place as a slave, so that Benjamin can return home to Jacob.

Here is an illustration of what Jesus did. Jesus achieved our liberation from sin and death and judgment by doing what Judah offered to do. He took our place.

And so sinners everywhere may enjoy the blessings of the heavenly land through the grace of Jesus Christ, the true offspring of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

## RESEARCH PAPER

### How does the New Testament use the Book of Genesis?