

How to Read *Genesis*

This first great hurdle in Bible Study is the indispensable foundation for the Whole Story. *Genesis* is all about Jesus, everything He Is and does, and it outlines *Everything* that really matters in this life:

~Why we live at all

~Why we die

~Why God became one of us &

~How His dying on our behalf allows us to live forever

It is a true hurdle though, because it is an obstacle that has led many to stumble, and quit. *Genesis* can be very difficult to read, and even harder to understand that there is a Jesus-centered message on every page. But, if you can clear it, then the rest of the story is laid out before you, and the entire Bible will come together beautifully-because you will see the threads that make the tapestry. How then, does one approach three thousand year old text to decipher how it explains the most important things in life? The only way that works: break it into pieces, take it slowly, and study commentary about how the hundred previous generations have understood it as well.

Genesis is a long and complicated book by Bible standards-50 chapters-but it can immediately be divided into four roughly equal parts: Origins, Abraham, Israel and Joseph. *Origins* is especially profound because it explains the foundational questions in life that are noted above. Its richly theological presentation is an obstacle all by itself...so it needs to be covered *very* slowly to truly comprehend the answers to these foundational questions. After passing down through eons of time and winding across thousands of years of human history, the story funnels down to focus on a single man. This one man, Abraham, is promised by God that *all of the world* will one day be blessed through his descendant-Jesus. The rest of *Genesis* is still further exploration of **Abraham** and the first generations of his family, specifically his grandson **Israel (Jacob)**, and his great grandson, **Joseph**.

Abraham begins a nineteen hundred year genealogical bloodline that brings Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. Eighty percent of the Bible is the story of Abraham's descendants, their triumphs and travails over the centuries: tribes and land and kings, whose only purpose was to bring Jesus to all of us. Everything in the Bible is about God coming to Earth to return us home to Paradise. If ever your understanding of the reading strays too far from this point, you are lost, and you need to find your way back to this singular path. Knowing the first generations in the Abraham-Jesus bloodline will keep you on the trail. It will improve your comprehension all along the journey, because these original characters from *Genesis* are referenced every step of the way.

Part 1: Origins

The beginning is especially difficult for modern readers to comprehend. It was written thousands of years ago to explain life's meaning, but it does so in a literary style that is no longer seen or taught. With two stories of creation, one immediately sees that what we are meant to know is presented in layers,

with great depth. Chapter 1 is very familiar because it is summarized in the first lines of the Nicene Creed: "I believe in One God, the Father Almighty, creator of Heaven and Earth, of all things visible and invisible". The claim that there is but One God was, and still remains, a radical concept. It is the foundational truth that untold millions have given up their lives to defend. This first and foremost chapter also speaks of the **absolute** beginning, an exceptionally critical fact-both theological and scientific-that has no refutation. Chapter 2 describes **Paradise**-living forever with God, as His Original Plan, and now our ultimate goal. Chapter 3 is the single most important chapter in the Bible outside of the passion narratives in the four Gospels: it explains why the passion occurred, the predicament we are in, as well as God's first gesture in His plan for redemption. It must be studied very slowly, line-by-line, to understand that **self-interest** is the foundational problem and that death itself is but the temporary punishment for choosing self over God. **Deciding for ourselves** what is wrong and what is right is the message of The Fall from Grace. The fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil represents the ability to determine what is right and wrong...and that it is what we stole from God-it remains the Only Problem we have...the **seed** of all others. Mercifully, God immediately promised that a different seed would return to defeat Satan, "*the seed of a Woman*"-One who would crush his head (Gen 3:15). The Serpent, who is Satan (Rev 12, Wis 2), had not won. He had not accomplished complete destruction-and eternal separation, from God. There would be another, a *God-Man* born of a Woman and God, who would Return All of His resurrected people to Paradise-and immortality, with Him. It is an amazing story, it is Your story, and it is really the only story that matters at the End...so, learn it well in this first, short, life.

Part 2: Abraham

After The Fall from Grace...and our temporary loss of Heaven, the rest of Origins is about the populating of Earth in our fallen state. It includes several familiar stories that continue to foreshadow Jesus in the likes of Abel, Noah and Shem. In a dozen pages, it theologically summarizes thousands of years of human history. The Human Genome Project has recently shown with DNA evidence that there was indeed an original set of parents for ALL of us, and that they lived about 40,000 years ago. This human story quite rapidly winds its way down to the one man who will be the beginning of the people of God, the people who will produce the God-Man. This second quarter of Genesis begins at chapter 12 with The Promise from God the Father Almighty to Abraham, the Father of our Faith, who was then known as Abram. God promises him an abundance of descendants who will 1) be given a bountiful land, 2) grow into a great kingdom, and 3) bless all the nations of the world. This Three-fold Promise is the framework for all the rest of the Bible, and it plays out this way, step-by-step, over the centuries. The Promised Land (1) is secured six centuries later under Joshua, a Great Kingdom (2) is established nine centuries later under David, and **all the world** would have to wait nineteen centuries for God Himself to become flesh and come to Earth as ransom for our trespasses (3). The mother of Jesus immediately understands her role as "the Woman" from Genesis, as she references the Three-fold Promise to Abraham upon her acceptance of God's proposition (Lk 1). These dozen chapters on the life of Abraham are incredibly rich, and reveal the beginning of countless themes that have played out over these ensuing 4,000 years. Please read them slowly-with strong commentary, and savor them deeply-because the human side of the Jesus Story is a straight line from here.

Pay particular attention to chapter 15 specifically, when God Himself makes a binding covenant oath with us. The COVENANT, or Testament, is an **irrevocable family bond**, so absolute in its nature that the punishment for breaking it is death. This is the crucial concept of Bible Study, and it must be thoroughly understood to explain the God of the Universe hanging dead on a tree. God has never broken any of the promises He has made with us, but we have. We have broken our covenant promises with Him repeatedly, in the most heinous of ways, and have thus earned our broken covenant death sentence many times over. Thus, the need for a “savior” who would die for us. Somebody had to die, a forever Oath with God had to be “fulfilled” one way or the other—all of us or Him. Through his infinite love for us, and unfathomable mercy, He chose to allow us to live by humbly becoming human and dying our death for us. The God of the Universe becomes a man—for us, dies the death we deserved—for us, to **fulfill** the Covenant Oath that required **all of us** to die. Understand that Good Friday and Easter Sunday accomplish very different things: the Covenant broken by our self-centeredness is fulfilled on Calvary—at the moment of Jesus’ Death. The punishment for our selfishness—death, is conquered by His bodily defeat of Death on that first Easter Sunday. Your understanding of the Climax of Life on this Earth: the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of *God Become Man*, will continue to grow through thorough comprehension of **Genesis**. The Beginning, the Climax, and the End are closely linked in every good story...especially the real ones.

Part 3: Israel

The second half of Genesis has a decidedly different feel as the story moves past Abraham. Abraham’s son Isaac is a strong prototype of Jesus in many ways, most dramatically during his sacrificial binding on the hills of Moriah. This is near what would one day be Jerusalem, along the same range as Calvary—an extensively elaborate prefiguring of Jesus’ Crucifixion. The text, however, gives Isaac’s adult life but a single chapter, and then quickly moves on to his son Jacob and the considerable detail it takes to explain his complex marital life. Jacob’s story is not told in a very sympathetic manner. His name symbolically means “to supplant,” which is just a nice way of saying “thief”. Jacob’s theft of his older brother’s *Birthright* and *Blessing* is why he must flee for his life to the distant home of his uncle Laban. There, he will spend twenty years working the fields—with his supplanted Blessing from God upon him throughout. At his eventual return home, he is overladen with the fruits of his talent...along with a dozen children and their four mothers (complex). During the journey home, Jacob is met by an Angel and actually wrestles with him for an entire night. Thereafter, he would be known as “Isra-El” for “he who has wrestled with God—and persevered”...a solid upgrade from “Thief”.

Part 4: Joseph

The final quarter of Genesis moves even deeper into the fourth generation from Abraham, and elaborates on the children of Israel. It is a bit tangential from the story in that it is mostly about Joseph, even though it would be Judah who would become the progenitor of the Jews in the bloodline to Jesus. The story of Joseph is still very popular on stage and screen and it is especially beautiful in its example of *forgiveness*—the only petition Jesus makes of us in the LORD’s Prayer. Joseph is another strong prototype of Jesus, as well as Saint Joseph and Saint Peter. Like Peter, he is given stewardship over the greatest kingdom on Earth. Under his protection, all of the members of his family: his father, his brothers, their

children-70 relatives in all, are settled in Egypt in the lap of luxury to prosper, be fruitful, and multiply. Thus ends the foundational book Genesis, with a *happily ever after* ending that would last for generations to come.

The stage is now set for the next book in the chronology, which begins when a king comes to power in Egypt “who knows not Joseph”...and enslaves the now thousands of Israelites out of fear of their numbers. This bondage would last more than 400 years, allowing the families of the sons of Israel to grow into 12 great tribes. They become hundreds of thousands of people awaiting deliverance, an *Exodus* from slavery in Egypt, and a return to the land promised to Abraham so long before. This deliverance would be wrought by God Himself, and led by the greatest of the Old Testament heroes, the man who “knew the LORD face to face” (Deut 34)...Moses.

The Senses of Scripture

“What is truth?” ~ P. Pilate (John 18)

A final key point in the study of the First Things is that the truth found here has always been seen through one of four (4) different lenses: the literal, the moral, the allegorical, or the heavenly. The literal truth is, of course, foundational: The Faith stands completely on the literal death of Jesus on Calvary, and the actual Empty Tomb of Easter Sunday that revealed to the world His permanent bodily resurrection. There is, however, a great deal of *spiritual truth* in Sacred Scripture as well, and Jesus taught in this manner throughout his ministry. He referred to Himself as the Bronze Serpent from the Desert Wanderings, the Temple of Solomon, and Jonah the prophet. In stating that the Sign of Jonah referred to Himself (Matt 12), He was not expounding on the veracity of whether or not Jonah was swallowed by a fish and vomited back up on dry land, He was allegorically referring to the three days in the belly of the fish as prefiguring His own death and resurrection. Most spiritual truths of the Old Testament point allegorically to Jesus, but there are also those that simply discuss how to behave properly in this world (moral truth) and those that point us towards our ultimate hope of heavenly reunion with the Father in heaven (anagogical truth). Throughout Sacred Scripture, one must always be aware of the lens through which the Truth is found, because mistaking these fundamental methods of comprehension has led to untold consternation across the centuries, and it still does today.

Thus, the proper Sense of Scripture is *how* we are to understand the Beauty and the Truth inherent in “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Deut 6, Mt 4). Some stumble in Old Testament Bible Study because they attempt to decipher ancient poetic theology as if it were newsprint journalism or a modern text of astrophysics, biology, or history. It was never meant to be read in this manner, as our use of journalistic factoids is actually very recent...but what it does have to say about you and Jesus is far more profound than anything else ever written. So, do not let this hurdle hinder you either, misunderstanding this basic concept is one of the greatest distractors of The Truth ever devised. Keep reading, keep studying, stay persistent...and know that the deepest of the depths, in each of the realms of science explored thus far, has done nothing but support the most fundamental Truths of *Genesis*.