



**A Bible Reading Plan
for the Book of Genesis (Chapters 1-25)**

August 22 - September 25, 2016

Mountain Brook Baptist Church
www.mbbc.org



Genesis

ABOUT PROJECT 119

Project 119 is a Bible reading initiative of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Our hope is that every member of our church body would be encouraged in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ through the regular reading of God's Word.

This reading plan will guide you through the book of Genesis. This plan will be released in two installments. The plan provides you a devotional thought and suggested Scripture reading for each day of the week. On the weekends, we suggest that you re-read the Scripture passages that you have been working through during the past week.

To receive email updates when devotionals are added to the blog, go to www.mbbc.org/blog, click on "Subscribe to Mountain Brook Blog by Email" and follow the instructions. To learn more about Project 119 and to access previous plans, visit www.mbbc.org/project119.

INTRODUCTION

Genesis means "origin" - very simply put, the book of Genesis traces for us the origins of creation, humanity, sin, and God's chosen people, Israel. However, as you read through the book of Genesis, you'll discover that the book is anything but simple! There are lengthy genealogies to weave through, shocking acts of sin, and powerful moments where we see the complexity of God's character - how He is a God who is merciful and gracious but also perfectly just.

The traditional view is that Genesis was written by Moses. His work gives us a picture of the biblical cycle of creation, Fall, and redemption. We see God's goodness and creativity at the forefront of Genesis 1-2 before the Fall of mankind, when Adam and Eve chose to disobey God's commandments and believe the lies of the serpent rather than the truthful promises of their Creator. The rest of Genesis - and the rest of the Bible - tells us the story of what God is doing to restore sinful humanity to Himself. The lineage of Adam is at the forefront of the Old Testament; the story of the Bible, in fact, is about how God continues to keep these promises He has made in Genesis to Adam's descendants. These promises are ultimately fulfilled through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Genesis is full of rich theology and beautiful narratives which paint a picture of God's faithfulness to His people even in the face of their own faithlessness. These stories serve as an encouragement to us that the God we serve is a God who keeps His promises and who has a bigger plan for the redemption of the world than we could ever imagine. These promises point us forward to the new heaven and the new earth, where we will worship together again - not in a garden but in a city, where God will dwell with His people once again.



Genesis

WEEK ONE: GENESIS 1-5 AUGUST 22-28

Monday, August 22 | Genesis 1 | Doug Dortch

"The Beginning"

The first two chapters of Genesis actually contain two creation stories, both of which are intended to show God's design in everything that has come about. Genesis 1 recounts the first story, with an emphasis on God as transcendent and sovereign, who brings order out of chaos and meaning out of absurdity.

Careful readers will notice in particular the rhythmic, worshipful nature of this first chapter. Creation is divided into six days, with the seventh day being "hallowed" as a special day of rest. It's the writer's way of telling us that everything in life ultimately brings us to a place of Sabbath rest and worship.

Moreover, God declares creation to be "good" after each stage, which offers the clearest and strongest affirmation of the sacred character of the natural world prior to the Fall. This is the world God intended, a world where everything has its place and nothing is without sacred purpose.

God's final and climactic creative act is the creation of humankind, which takes place on the sixth day. Though God has characterized everything else in creation as "good," only humankind is described as having been created "in God's image," which explains humanity's responsibility for the created order, not to mention the innate worth of every human soul.

The purpose of this first chapter is to attach ultimate responsibility for existence to a God who towers above creation and is infinitely superior to everything and everyone in it. Unlike some world religions that worship creation as a substitute for the divine, the book of Genesis calls us to pay homage to a God who, though responsible for all that is, can in no way be contained by it. Nature may point to God's glory, but ultimately we cannot know Him until He reveals Himself to us. We can only bow before the Mystery that confronts us and revere the Creator who defies all attempts to control or constrain Him.

The first chapter of Genesis reminds us that the chaos and confusion with which so many of us must deal in the course of life is not God's perfect intent. Thus we can yield our despair to Him in the confidence that He is greater than our despair and is fully capable of turning it and us into something that is indeed "very good."



Genesis

WEEK ONE: GENESIS 1-5 AUGUST 22-28

Tuesday, August 23 | Genesis 2 | Doug Dortch

"Adam and Eve"

The second chapter of Genesis offers a second story of creation, one marked by a God who is very much imminent in terms of His desire to enter into relationship with the culmination of creation – humankind. If the first chapter presents a God who is distant and removed, towering above all creation, the second chapter shows us that side of a God who walks and talks, plants and breathes – a God who is very near and relational. These two pictures don't describe two different gods; they picture the two sides of the one Creator God, who is at the same time transcendent and imminent.

This chapter focuses on Adam and Eve, and God's plan for investing them with the responsibility of caring for His creation. But along with that responsibility comes boundaries and accountability. God puts Adam and Eve in a garden place called Eden, which means "fertility," and there God allows them to have access to every part of the garden, with the exception of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God forbids them to eat of that tree, lest they consider themselves wise enough to strike out on their own and in the process lose their sense of dependence upon Him.

Note as well the companionship and help that Adam and Eve provide for one another. The sense of celebration that Adam expresses over Eve's creation is testimony to God's establishment of a new type of relationship, which will bless humankind – one that recognizes the coming together of man and woman from different families in order to form a new family, a "one flesh" union that promotes stability and security for humans who would not find this level of fulfillment in any other way.

Wednesday, August 24 | Genesis 3 | Doug Dortch

"The Fall of Humankind"

What began so idyllically quickly degenerates into tragedy, and all because of Adam and Eve's refusal to abide by God's instruction, specifically God's proscription that they not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A speaking serpent contradicts God's warning of immediate death and convinces the couple to doubt God's instruction, and ultimately to reject it.

While many commentators have placed the greater blame on Eve for role in this rebellion, the fact of the matter is that Adam was equally responsible in it, even to the point of not only partaking of the fruit, but also blaming God for giving him Eve in the first place! The tendency of both Adam and Eve (continued on next page)



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to pass the blame for their transgression instead of accepting responsibility for it is one that has been repeated throughout time. God's refusal to accept their projection of guilt is a reminder to us that we do well always to confess our sin and trust God's mercy with the consequences.

We see that truth even in this passage where God expels Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. While we may read their expulsion as punishment for their rebellion, we should also note that God did so in order to keep them from eating of the tree of life in their fallen condition, which would put their eventual redemption in question – a matter that the remainder of Scripture is to address.

Thursday, August 25 | Genesis 4 | Doug Dortch

"Sin's Role in Human Conflict"

The consequences of Adam and Eve's rebellion carry on to the generations that follow through various conflicts that arise, the first of which is a conflict between their two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain's name means "possession," given to him by his mother Eve as an expression of celebration over her participation with God in giving him life. Abel's name means "frailty," which may signal some disappointment Eve had with this child. One intriguing interpretation is that the names of these two sons represent two basic human impulses – possession and frailty – though they are more likely a play on the physical strength of Cain over the weakness of Abel. Yet the story will ultimately reveal that true strength is best measured by another criterion – one that yields the highest allegiance to God.

The two sons represent another ancient conflict, one of professions. Cain represents farmers, while Abel symbolizes wandering herdsman. Israel in the early years was more like Abel and only became farmers when they entered into the Promised Land of Canaan and learned agricultural practices from the Canaanites (who also introduced them to the worship of Baal, an ancient fertility god).

The drama centers on their sacrifices to God. Both were sincere, but God accepted only Abel's sacrifice. Some would say that the reason behind God's acceptance of Abel's sacrifice was that his was an animal sacrifice, but the Old Testament clearly contains provisions for worship that involve sacrifices of produce, which Cain brought. The real reason for God's acceptance was that Abel brought the best that he had, while Cain brought simply "an offering." God demands our best, because God deserves our best. Abel understood that truth, and God's acceptance of his sacrifice reflects it.

The conflict escalates as Cain's reaction to God's choice reveals the wrong attitude of his heart. Had
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Cain's heart been right, he would have thought more seriously as to the reason for why his sacrifice was rejected. He should have taken his bitterness and confusion to God, but he didn't. Instead he lashed out at his brother, murderously so, and Cain's reaction shows us that if sin is not resolved, it will ultimately result in an increase of enmity that will only drive us farther away from God, which becomes Cain's fate.

Cain is cursed to a life of a land that is unproductive, a truly nightmarish scenario for any farmer. Cain immediately begs for mercy because he knows that he cannot live long without God's favor on his labor. God then acts mercifully toward Cain by placing on him a mark, not as a sign of eternal curse, but more as a means of grace, providence, and ultimately a means to his protection, which he will need once he goes away from the presence of the LORD.

The last verses in the chapter recount the beginnings of civilization. They suggest to the reader that as civilization increases, spirituality decreases – a sobering thought for modern folk. Cain's son Enoch is a builder of cities, which as the story of Genesis continues will become "dens of iniquity" like Sodom and Gomorrah. Another descendant, Tubal-Cain, becomes a maker of bronze and iron, from which idols will be fashioned in the days ahead. Still another descendant, Lamech, shows where unbridled ambition leads: "Vengeance doesn't belong to the LORD; it belongs to me, seventy-seven fold!"

Yet there is also a remnant of faithfulness, as there always is in the Bible, even in the worst of times. In this case there is another son of Adam and Eve, Seth, who begets Enosh, and out of the line of Enosh come a people who began to call upon the name of the LORD, which suggests the sort of personal relationship for which God created Adam and Eve in the first place.

Friday, August 26 | Genesis 5 | Doug Dortch

"Hope in the Midst of Conflict"

Sometimes we wonder about the Bible's genealogies. Can we skip over them? We do so only to our detriment. Even the genealogies contain deep spiritual truths.

Someone has called this particular genealogy "the history of nobody-ism." Indeed, on the surface it appears that nothing about any of these persons listed contains much of spiritual significance. However, when we get to the person of Enoch in verse 24, notice what it says: "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." The expression "walked with God" suggests intimate
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companionship; again, the sort of companionship with God for which Adam and Eve were created. As a result of Enoch's fellowship with God, he did not die; God "took him."

Herein lies the first promise of immortality in the Bible for those who walk with God. Though we live in a world where sin has brought about devastating consequences, God makes it possible for those who are obedient to His will to live forever. There is a way to retrace our steps back to the tree of life (Revelation 22:2), a way made possible by another "tree of life" – the cross of Jesus, whereby He atoned for our sins and made it possible for us to be reconciled to God. Jesus, too, walked with God, and He taught us how to walk with God. Therefore, even in the midst of a day where people seem to care little about the things of God, there is hope, and there is grace. But most importantly, there is always the promise of life everlasting through God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Saturday, August 27-Sunday, August 28 | Genesis 1-5

Reread Genesis 1-5 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Genesis

WEEK TWO: GENESIS 6-10 AUGUST 29 - SEPTEMBER 4

Monday, August 29 | Genesis 6 | Amy Jackson

The account of Noah and the ark has always intrigued me; while there are cutesy and sweet depictions of the story in nurseries, if you think about it, the events of the flood are actually pretty graphic and catastrophic. It reminds me yet again that sometimes we like to shy away from thinking about God's judgment. Yet in Genesis 6, we see that God doesn't bring unwarranted judgment - He looks upon mankind and sees that the "wickedness of man was great in the earth" (Genesis 6:5). Take a look at the end of verse 5 - God recognizes that "every intention of the thoughts of his (man's) heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). What a profound statement! Man's sinfulness grieves God's heart and He resolves to destroy the creation He brought forth in Genesis 1.

This would be a sad story, if it were not for the small but beautiful word found in verse 8 - "but." Think about how that word can change everything! Perhaps your doctor says to you, "The tests confirmed that you have this serious disease...but there's a known cure for it." Or, your child calls and says, "Mom, I was in a terrible car wreck...but I'm okay!" We hear the bad news of Genesis 6:5, but the good news of Genesis 6:8 is that Noah found favor in God's eyes. Now, this favor isn't anything Noah receives on his own accord - he receives unmerited grace from the Lord. We'll see that Noah is a sinner too (just wait until Genesis 9!) but rather than asking the question, "Why is it that only Noah receives this special favor?" we should ask the question, "Why does anyone receive God's unmerited grace at all?" Rather than seeing Genesis 6 as just a story of God's judgment, we should also see it as a story of God's grace.

This grace points us forward to Ephesians 2, where Paul tells us that, like mankind in Genesis 6, we too were also dead in our sins, on the path to judgment - "but God, being rich in mercy...made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:5). None of us deserves this salvation given freely by Jesus, just as Noah didn't deserve to be saved from God's wrath - but God continues to reveal Himself over and over as a God of grace who bestows mercy to the undeserving.

Tuesday, August 30 | Genesis 7 | Amy Jackson

When I read Genesis 7, the first thing I think about is Y2K. I'm from a small town in western North Carolina, and most people in my town were convinced that Y2K was going to happen. I have memories of only getting board games at Christmas that year because my parents were sure we wouldn't have power once January 1 hit. Now, after January 1 passed, it was apparent that what had been feared actually didn't happen - which was a great relief for me as a seventh grader!

The difference between Y2K and Genesis 7 is that the flood does happen; in the first part of (continued on next page)



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Genesis 7, God commands Noah to build an ark, to gather animals, and to take refuge as He prepares to "send rain on the earth forty days...and blot out [every living thing] from the face of the ground" (Genesis 7:4). God speaks and Noah obeys. And, what happens? Just as the Lord said, "the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were open...and rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights" (Genesis 7:11-12). Unlike the evening of December 31, when the clock struck midnight and we looked around to see if the lights would flicker - the prediction in Genesis 6 surely comes to pass. God brings judgment on the wickedness of the earth and blots out "every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals" (Genesis 7:23).

We fast forward to 2016 and it seems again as if we live in a world where sin reigns. However, we trust God's promise that He will one day make an end of evil - that final judgment will come when Christ returns and that Satan will be forever and finally vanquished. Our God takes sin seriously and assures us that evil will not have the last word. His judgment is sure - we don't have to wonder if it's going to happen the same way we wondered if computer systems would fail on January 1, 2000.

This coming judgment is bad news for those who are God's enemies, but can become good news because our God takes forgiveness seriously! Because of Jesus' death, those who trust in Him are saved from God's punishment. Just as the ark was the vehicle of mercy for Noah, the cross is the vehicle of mercy for us! Praise God that He makes His enemies into His friends through the work of the cross.

Wednesday, August 31 | Genesis 8 | Amy Jackson

I love comparisons and contrasts. I think it's so interesting that, in Genesis 7, the flood comes quickly - not without warning, but quickly! The account tells us that the heavens burst open and the rains fell. But in Genesis 8, we see the flood recede ever so slowly. The first twelve verses seem like a waiting game; God brings a wind over the earth and the waters subside, and then they recede, and then finally the mountain peaks can be seen again.

These verses also remind me about the different ways we see God's hand at work in our lives. Sometimes His work is unmistakeable and what He is doing is obvious and clear - such as bringing a flood of judgment on the earth! But sometimes, what He is doing isn't so clear. We might have to wait days or months or even years before we can discern His hand and understand what He is doing.

In both cases - the flood and the recession of the flood - we know that God was the one in control - and yet He chooses two different ways to do things. Perhaps He was giving Noah and his
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family time to rest and to reflect on the judgment they had seen. We can only guess as to why everything seemed to unfold so slowly. Isn't that also the case with us? We may not always understand God's purposes or His timing, but we can trust that He is at work and that He is faithful.

Look again at verse 1 - "God remembered Noah." What a beautiful truth! God remembers His children and acts toward them in faithfulness. And we see His mercy yet again in this passage as we look ahead to verse 21, where God promises that He will never again destroy the earth in such a way. His promise is not based on humanity's goodness - God declares again that "the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Genesis 8:21) - but on the basis of God's own character and on His mercy and love. So, when it seems like perhaps you cannot see God's hand at work - trust in God's heart and that He is faithful to His own - He remembers His children and acts toward them according to His faithful love.

Thursday, September 1 | Genesis 9 | Amy Jackson

When I was in seminary, one of the topics that fascinated me was biblical theology. It sounds like a fancy word, but really it's just the study of themes we see throughout the Bible. People in biblical theology spend lots of time researching, writing, and teaching to help others see the larger picture of the Bible - that the Bible isn't just telling a lot of little stories that are unrelated but instead is telling a bigger story of redemption. Biblical theology seeks to put the pieces together and help show how the smaller stories point to the bigger story of God's redemption.

People who study biblical theology are really interested in patterns in the Bible; one of the reasons that this passage intrigues me is because we see the same themes of Genesis 1-3 emerging in this text. After the flood, God re-establishes His creation, commissioning Noah and his sons to be fruitful and multiply on the earth, and to have dominion over every living creature (see Genesis 9:1-7). These commands are similar to those given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 2. Then God also tells them that He is establishing a covenant with Noah, his offspring, and all of creation, vowing to never again destroy the earth by flood.

Things sound pretty good, but unfortunately we get back to echoes of Genesis 3 rather quickly. We could have fooled ourselves into thinking that Noah is the savior of the story, and then we read Genesis 9:18-29 where he indulges in the fruits of his vineyard and gets drunk. It's a weird incident, to be sure, but it's also a reminder to us that biblical characters are not exempt from sin and error. Just as Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, Noah sins in the vineyard and we are left to continue to look for a savior.

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Humanity is in desperate need of a rescuer and even the most righteous man on the face of the earth at that time - Noah - isn't qualified for the task. These echoes of Genesis 1-3 in the rest of Scripture point us forward to our need for a Redeemer found ultimately in Jesus, who is fully God and fully man, and yet is without sin. Through His death on the cross, Jesus will crush the serpent of Genesis 3 with a striking, deadly blow - and because of His resurrection, even death itself will one day die.

Friday, September 2 | Genesis 10 | Amy Jackson

Have you ever watched someone paint? I painted as a kid, but recently, I was mesmerized watching a good friend paint flowers. I've never thought about all of the colors and shades that go into making the flowers look so realistic and beautiful - there's so much layering that happens and so much shading that goes on in the background. In my head, sometimes I just think people paint one thing on a canvas and it's the final product - which is a pretty naive thought, actually, because it takes a lot of time and work to paint a masterpiece.

I think it's interesting how Genesis 9 gives us the "bigger picture" of Noah's family and their story. They're commanded to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). But in Genesis 10, we see the individual brushstrokes and shading and layering of that command - the literal depiction of what it means for them to be fruitful and multiply.

As you read, concentrate on Noah's three sons - Japheth (Genesis 10:1-5), Ham (Genesis 10:6-20), and Shem (Genesis 10:21-31), reading each section as an account of their descendants. The author of Genesis takes great care to paint a very specific picture of Noah's children following God's command to be fruitful and multiply. Do any of their descendants sound familiar? Genesis 10 sets up the story of the rest of the Old Testament for us - we have the ancestors of Abraham and the future Israelites, and we also have the ancestors of the nations surrounding Israel.

Dr. Allen Ross, a professor at Beeson Divinity School, points out that there are three things to remember as we consider Genesis 10. First, we see that all of humanity is united because all of humanity ultimately comes from one family - from the lineage of Noah! Second, however, we see that humanity is also very divided. Notice all of the different regions we see in this passage - throughout the Old Testament we will see how language, race, and territory divide this once-united people - and these divisions continues to plague the world today. Third, even through division, Dr. Ross points out that the story of the Old Testament is about God blessing His people - and perhaps He is even using this division as a part of His plan to bless His people and to also bless the nations.



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WEEK TWO: GENESIS 6-10
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Saturday, September 3-Sunday, September 4 | Genesis 6-10

Reread Genesis 6-10 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Genesis

WEEK THREE: GENESIS 11-15 SEPTEMBER 5-11

Monday, September 5 | Genesis 11 | Amy Jackson

It's appropriate that, on Labor Day, we're reading about the Tower of Babel! Labor Day has been observed since the late 1800s as a celebration of the contributions of the working class toward our society. Now, work isn't a bad thing - in fact, in Genesis, God mandated work as a part of created life before the Fall. But, because of the Fall, everything has been marred by sin, and that includes work. Man faces thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:18-19) in his endeavors, and these aren't the only stumbling blocks. Often, our battle with sin and work is an internal battle; our culture has idolized work as the foundation of society. Our careers give us identity, and we find our self-worth in our successes, while career failure brings with it a sense of shame and loss.

What does this have to do with Genesis 11? As we read the account of the Tower of Babel, you'll notice there's nothing inherently evil with building a tower. Their sin wasn't primarily based on what they were doing, but on why they were doing it. Hear the arrogance of Genesis 11:4: "Let us build for ourselves a city...let us make a name for ourselves." Self-worship and worship of careers and success has been around for a long time; we can't fool ourselves into thinking that our society alone struggles with this "new" sin.

What is God's response? Notice first that the Lord has to look down from heaven to see what they're doing. Now, the author uses exaggeration here to make a point - it isn't as if the Lord has bad eyesight or can't see what they are doing from His throne in heaven (and, notice that they wanted to build a tower to reach heaven - but it seems they fell short of their goal!). The point is that, while their tower looks so gigantic in their own eyes, in comparison to the Maker of the mountains, it's a small speck. Isn't that the same with our own work? We get so wrapped up in what we are doing that sometimes we forget the smallness of our lives. We need divine perspective.

For these people, the Lord provides divine perspective by dividing them - He confuses their language and disperses them across the face of the earth. We read about these divisions in Genesis 10; Genesis 11 gives us the reason for the dispersion. In many ways, Genesis 11 is a warning for us too, lest we look at our own accomplishments and the works of our hands and take glory in ourselves. I think Labor Day is a good time to rest from work and to rejoice in how the Lord uses our talents and gives us creative endeavors to make the world a better place and to serve others. I think it's also a good time, with this story in the forefront of our minds, to rest from our work and to recognize that our identity doesn't come from our creations but instead comes from our Creator.

Tuesday, September 6 | Genesis 12 | Amy Jackson

Some moments in life are turning points - they change the direction of our paths and help define who
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we are. Genesis 12 is one of those landmark passages in the life of a man named Abram - but it's also a turning point which defines the rest of the book and gives us a trajectory for the entire Old Testament! Genesis 12 is a passage that has everything to do with the plot of Scripture and what God is doing in His story.

At the end of Genesis 11, we meet a man named Terah, a descendant of Noah's son Shem. Terah has a son - we'll call him Abram for now. Their family is from Ur but they end up settling in Haran, until one day when Abram has a life-changing encounter with the Lord. Look at Genesis 12:1-3. What does God say? He commands Abram to go to an unknown land - a land that He will show Abram - and He promises Abram that He will make him a great nation, that He will bless him, and that He will make him a blessing to the nations.

Abram's response shows his faith: we turn to verse 4 and we see that Abram obeys and they begin a journey to Canaan. And, in case you've missed it, here's a plot spoiler - the rest of Genesis (and the Old Testament) is all about how God is going to be faithful to keep these promises He's made to Abram - despite the odds. While we may know that the story will end well (Abram will have a son named Isaac, and eventually his descendants will make it to the promised land and form Israel), from Abram's perspective, he's leaving his family and livelihood in search of an unknown land, and while he's been promised progeny, we'll later discover that his wife is barren and they're advanced in age.

It would be easy to make Abram the hero of the story, but alas, we have Genesis 12:10-20! This incident of Abram trying to deceive the Pharaoh reminds us that we shouldn't try to grasp control of God's plan through our schemes. And yet here again we see God as the hero of the story - He delivers Abram and Sarai and proves to us yet again that He is the one who will deliver His people and will see to it that His plan will come to pass, not on the basis of who we are (or how well we can scheme!) but on the basis of His own character.

Wednesday, September 7 | Genesis 13 | Amy Jackson

Sometimes our eyes deceive us. What looks appealing and beautiful can actually be dangerous and deadly. We see this at work in Genesis 13. Abram leaves Egypt and returns to the hill country; at this point, he is quite wealthy. The land he's found seems to be suitable to the eye - but there's a problem. Abram and Lot, his nephew, realize this land can't support them both.

Here, we see a bit of Abram's character and faith in the Lord; knowing that the Lord has promised him a land and an inheritance, and knowing that he should get the first choice of the land, Abram
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nonetheless offers Lot the right to choose first. Abram realizes he is free to give Lot the first choice because he knows that God is the ultimate giver and has promised to provide for him; he is able to open his hands and give freely. And, well, our friend Lot's eyes deceive him! He looks up to the land of the Jordan Valley and sees how fertile it is, and he immediately seizes it.

If the story ended here, we'd be confused. Why is it that Abram has given up the right to the "better" land? However, we're told a little more about this land in Genesis 13 which reminds us that we can't always trust what we see. Lot's chosen land is close to Sodom and Gomorrah; in fact, the author hints at the coming destruction (Genesis 13:10). We'll have to read on to see how Lot's story unfolds, but this is pretty negative foreshadowing!

Abram and Lot show us the difference between walking by faith and walking by sight. Lot walked by sight - he saw what he thought would be ideal for him, and he seized the opportunity to have the "better" land. Abram walked by faith, trusting that God would give him what He had promised, and this promise is reaffirmed at the end of Genesis 13 - the Lord lifts Abram's eyes to see the land spread out in front of him, vowing that He will give Abram this land and that He will "make his offspring as the dust of the earth" (Genesis 13:16). Genesis 13 ends with Abram building an altar to God and worshipping - even when he has not yet received what he has been promised. Abram walks by faith and not by sight.

Thursday, September 8 | Genesis 14 | Amy Jackson

Genesis 14 is one of those unsuspecting chapters of the Bible. When you start reading it, it sounds like it's just giving a summary of a skirmish: Lot, Abram's nephew, is captured in battle. Abram, like a good uncle, responds by saving Lot. But when you get to the end of Genesis 14, you realize that the contrast between good and evil, between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth, have more to do with the end of the chapter than the actual warfare at the beginning. (And this is a helpful metaphor for us when we think about spiritual warfare - it's sometimes quite unsuspecting!).

After Abram rescues Lot, he is met by the king of Sodom and the king of Salem, Melchizedek. Melchizedek proclaims that Abram has been blessed by God and that God has delivered Abram, giving him triumph over his enemies. The king of Sodom's response seems benign at first; he offers Abram material possessions as a result of his conquest. Abram, however, refuses his offer, declaring, "I have lifted my hand to the LORD...that I would not take...anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich'" (Genesis 14:23).

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Genesis

WEEK THREE: GENESIS 11-15 SEPTEMBER 5-11

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While the physical warfare took place in the first sixteen verses, these final verses show us spiritual warfare - the battle between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth. Melchizedek offers praise to God, recognizing that God is the one who grants victory and that He promised to bless Abram (Genesis 12:1-3). The king of Sodom, on the other hand, offers Abram all the world's treasures. Rather than waiting on God's blessing, Abram could reach out and seize these blessings for himself.

The kingdom of heaven operates differently than the kingdom of earth. I can see this battle at work in my own life - the battle between worldly success and grasping blessing for myself, versus walking in humility and trusting God to bless those who follow Him in obedience. Jesus' example is helpful for us as we think about following God in faith, trusting Him to bless His children. Christ was similarly tempted by Satan in the desert; Satan offered Him all worldly kingdoms in exchange for worship. Jesus refused Satan's offer, choosing instead to humble Himself and knowing that, at the right time, God would exalt Him as King of kings and Lord of lords (Philippians 2:1-11).

Friday, September 9 | Genesis 15 | Amy Jackson

Genesis 15 is all about trust - biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann tells us that Genesis 15 answers two questions: "Can Abram trust God?" and "Can God be trusted?" Can God be trusted to keep the promises He has made to Abram? We find ourselves at a place where Abram has rejected the king of Sodom's offers for plunder. He is waiting for another kingdom, a greater kingdom that has been promised to him (Genesis 12:1-3), but how long must he wait?

I think we can all identify with Abram in some way. Although God has promised him a nation and a heritage, Abram continues childless - he is old and his wife is barren. The likelihood of them having an heir through a biological child seems grim. Abram is a man of faith, and he's also a man who is honest enough to approach God with his doubts. God responds by telling Abram to look up at the heavens - his offspring will be more numerous than the stars in the sky.

I think one of the themes of Abram's life is trust. Can Abram trust God enough to leave his home and family and to journey to an unknown land? Can he trust that God will provide even when circumstances aren't ideal? And yet we see, over and over again, God reminds Abram (and us!) that He is a God who can be trusted - even in the unknown. God makes a covenant with Abram here in Genesis 15, and God promises to uphold His covenant; the animals are cut in half, and it is as if God says, "If I fail to keep my promises, on my own head be it." But we know that God keeps His promises and that he keeps His covenant love...no matter what. His love is unconditional. The rest of the Bible assures us that He will keep His covenant - despite His people's faithlessness, God remains faithful.

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Genesis

WEEK THREE: GENESIS 11-15 SEPTEMBER 5-11

Perhaps today you are like Abram, waiting on the Lord. I don't know what you are waiting for, but I do believe that periods of waiting are formative to our faith; they teach us to trust in the Lord and what is unseen. God can be trusted to keep the promises He makes. This is good news for us today! And the final stamp of approval on this love is the cross. The cross is the picture of God's perfect love for His children; if we can trust Him for salvation and forgiveness of our sins, then we can trust Him for all that we need. All of the promises of God are "yes" in Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Wherever you are today, I hope this is encouragement for your soul as you wait - trusting that your waiting is not in vain and that you are waiting for a better hope and a greater kingdom. Take some time to also read Paul's account of Abram's waiting, found in Romans 4:13-25; ask that God would continue to remind you of His trustworthiness and faithfulness, even in the midst of waiting.

Saturday, September 10-Sunday, September 11 | Genesis 11-15

Reread Genesis 11-15 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Genesis

WEEK FOUR: GENESIS 16-20 SEPTEMBER 12-18

Monday, September 12 | Genesis 16 | Elizabeth Helms

Genesis 16 shows the destructive nature of human sin and the damage it causes in the lives of individuals, families, and nations. Simultaneously we also see God's sovereignty, compassionate care, and faithful provision. Abram and Sarai sinned against God because they did not trust that He would be faithful to His promise. They were tired of waiting for the promised heir, so they took control of the situation and determined to produce a child by another way. Their solution? Hagar, Sarai's servant. It was not an unusual custom in their day for barren wives to rely on their maidservants to produce heirs, but this was not the path God intended. This sin caused great tension within their household, resulting in Hagar's motherly pride leading her to treat her mistress with bitterness. In turn, her mistress treated her harshly.

In verse 7, we see a shift in the narrative; God steps in. So far in this chapter, everyone had pushed God's plans to the side and made quite a mess of things. But here God speaks, and when He does we find that our God is not distant and unmoved by our sorrows. He is ever-present and compassionate. God hears Hagar's cries of distress in the wilderness and promises that she will not be abandoned. She too will have a son. While he will not be the promised heir, he will also have offspring that cannot be numbered.

God saw Hagar's distress, just as he saw the distress of Abram and Sarai in their bareness. This chapter thus illustrates an important truth - God hears our prayers; God sees our trouble. We as believers are to cry out to God, and wait, trusting His sovereign care and His perfect timing. The God we worship is not a distant, insensitive, forgetful god. He is an ever-present, compassionate, and faithful God who cares deeply for the needs of His people.

This chapter ends with great suspense. We look forward with longing to read of the day when God came through on his promise to Abram and Sarai. As they waited, we also learn to wait - patiently, but persistently, knowing that our God is able.

Tuesday, September 13 | Genesis 17 | Elizabeth Helms

Names are important. Names are closely tied with the core of our identity. Yet sometimes people change their name for any number of reasons. Maybe a teenager, who had always been called Jimmy, suddenly wants to be known as James when he goes off to college. This change says something about the way he views himself. He wants the world to see that he is different from the boy he was in high school.

In Genesis 17, God takes on the task of changing names, but this change isn't simply a superficial (continued on next page)



Genesis

WEEK FOUR: GENESIS 16-20 SEPTEMBER 12-18

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matter of perception. Rather, it is a profound theological statement about God, God's people, and God's promises. Abraham means "father of a multitude," and his name served as a reminder that God would be faithful. Nations and kings would indeed arise from his lineage.

The second major point of this passage is God's covenant with Abraham and the sign of circumcision. In Scripture, covenants are the means by which God establishes and governs relationships with His people. The "sign" of the covenants serves as a perpetual reminder of one's commitment and responsibilities to the covenant partner. The sign of the Abrahamic covenant is for every male within the household of Abraham to submit to circumcision.

The name changing and the sign of the covenant in this passage are not empty formalities. There is a spiritual change at work. God utilizes these externals as a way to remind His people of the internal change He is creating within them. These reminders are a call to remain faithful to serve the one and only Almighty God.

Last but not least, the promise of a son is again reiterated. Abraham and Sarah have been waiting for another thirteen years as they watched Ishmael grow up. But now is the time. God has finally revealed that "this time next year" the promised child will make his arrival. This is quite shocking news. How does Abraham respond? He responds in obedience. He follows God's instructions and walks faithfully as he waits.

Wednesday, September 14 | Genesis 18 | Elizabeth Helms

Genesis 18 opens with a unique visitation by the Lord to Abraham, and this is the only place in scripture where a trio of heavenly visitors occurs. The uniqueness of this appearance serves to highlight the significance of the news proclaimed: Sarah in her old age will at last bear a son. We are again reminded of how God works in miraculous, unconventional ways. God makes Sarah and Abraham wait for many years, until she is well beyond childbearing age, to showcase God's mighty work of fulfilling His promise.

The passage takes a drastic turn when we shift focus from the reminder of God's promise to look at God's justice in judgment. We see a stark juxtaposition of the sinful wickedness of Sodom and the calling of Abraham and his descendants to "keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:19).

Abraham subsequently launches into an extended intercession on behalf of the righteous people
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Genesis

WEEK FOUR: GENESIS 16-20 SEPTEMBER 12-18

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within the city. He ultimately asks the question, "Is God just in His judgment?" God is gracious in hearing Abraham in his questioning, and in verse 21, God says, "I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know." God is not indiscriminately destroying entire cities. God is not irrational in His judgment. God is not an agent of injustice. On the contrary, the Lord's decisive judgment is based on accurate information. At the end of Abraham's inquiry we see that there aren't even ten righteous people within the city of Sodom. God is willing to spare the city for the righteous, but alas, the righteous few cannot be found.

This episode in Genesis is a difficult picture of doubt and destruction, but it is all the more a picture of grace. The people of Sodom were wicked people, but so are we. But God in His mercy has chosen to redeem us and spare us from the judgment we each deserve. It is only by the merits of Christ that we are not seen as despicable in God's eyes and are invited to be partakers in the covenant blessings. Thanks be to God!

Thursday, September 15 | Genesis 19 | Elizabeth Helms

This chapter continues the story of the consequences of sin within the city of Sodom...and y'all it's a doozy! Verses 1-11 show, with greater detail, the nature of the sinful people. The men living in Sodom are seeking with great aggression to satisfy their sexual desires with other men. This sin has caused the Lord to send these angels to destroy the city. However, God is showing mercy to Lot and his family by offering them the opportunity to escape this devastation. All He asks them to do is leave and never look back.

In verse 26, we read the familiar scene of Lot's wife being turned to a pillar of salt because she disobeyed and looked back upon the sinful city. The final episode of this chapter shows Lot and his daughters seeking refuge in the hills. The subsequent actions of the daughters show how deeply they have been influenced by the Canaanite culture that surrounded them in their city. They conspire to get their father drunk so that they can become pregnant by him. Talk about a messy family dynamic! Both of the daughters have sons, and these sons become the father of two people groups who are a thorn in the side of the Israelites for centuries.

While this is an extremely difficult passage that is full of sin at every turn, God is still at work. The Moabites are the descendants of Lot and his oldest daughter. Many years later we find God using this unfortunate situation for his glory and to fulfill his promises. Turn over to the book of Ruth. Ruth is... guess what? A Moabite! Ruth meets and marries Boaz and they have a son named Obed. Read Ruth 4:18-20. This is where God takes a broken and sinful family and uses them for His purposes of



Genesis

WEEK FOUR: GENESIS 16-20 SEPTEMBER 12-18

establishing the line of King David. The line from which many generations later our savior Jesus Christ, would be born.

We all have families and we all know that they are broken and fraught with sin. Today let's reflect on ways that we can bring glory to God through our family. How can we be salt and light to unbelievers in our family? How can we challenge our family to live more like Christ? No family is perfect. But we can all point our families to Christ as we look forward to the day when God will create a perfect family of all believers.

Friday, September 16 | Genesis 20 | Elizabeth Helms

The Almighty God who we worship is not a distant God. This passage shows God providentially intervening and protecting Abraham and Sarah, protecting their marriage, and ultimately protecting His promises.

Abraham and Sarah have been waiting for years and years to see God's promises reach their fulfillment. Finally this fulfillment is right around the corner! But these promises are threatened when Abraham, again (see Genesis 12:10-20), passes off Sarah as his sister. She is taken into the king's harem and the purity of Abraham and Sarah's marriage is at risk; however, God shows that He is in control. One commentator pointed out the promise is risked in exchange for personal safety. If this promise is ever to be fulfilled, it will have VERY little to do with human efforts. Abraham and Sarah's moral deficiencies point to the miraculous grace of God.

Today we can all look back on our lives and see times where we have selfishly told "half-truths," just like Abraham did in this passage. How have those lies brought us protection or helped us gain greater status in the world? As believers, in this life we are not given the promise of safety and security. Rather we are promised that we will be hated, slandered, and persecuted because of our association with Christ (Matthew 5:11, 10:22). Let us pray today that in all facets of our life we will live boldly, standing firm in our identity as the redeemed of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Saturday, September 17-Sunday, September 18 | Genesis 16-20

Reread Genesis 16-20 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.



Genesis

WEEK SIX: GENESIS 21-25 SEPTEMBER 19-25

Monday, September 19 | Genesis 21 | Elizabeth Helms

The day finally arrived when Abraham's faith was made sight. His son was born! God has worked a miracle and Abraham and Sarah respond with obedience and worship. God is faithful to His promise and provides the promised son through whom all the nations would be blessed.

The name Isaac means "he laughs," and Sarah's comment (Genesis 21:6-7) points to the fact that her son's name would be a reminder to future generations of God's faithfulness.

In verses 8-21 Hagar and Ishmael are sent away – and surprisingly God affirms to Abraham that this decision is in accord with His will. In verse 9, we see Ishmael's response to the birth of the long-awaited child is also to laugh, but commentators point out that while Sarah's laughter was the response of faith, Ishmael's laughter was a response of unbelief and mockery. This story shows us that anything or anyone who opposes God's plan must be removed and will not receive God's blessing.

However, God does not abandon Hagar and Ishmael. God promises to provide for them and make Ishmael into a great nation. Their expulsion was not a divine rejection but rather a divine protection for Isaac. We again see that our God is a God who cares for the outcast. Hagar again cries out to God and He meets her in the wilderness. He meets her needs, comforting her with the promise of future generations.

The final section in this chapter is a treaty made between Abraham and Abimelech. This treaty shows that the native people recognize the strength of Abraham's God as well as Abraham's role as a leader. Lastly, Abraham's response to all that God has accomplished in this narrative is worship (Genesis 21:33).

Abraham was confronted with his faults and the ways in which he strayed from God's direction. But he is also keenly aware of God's sovereign care and commitment to His covenant. As we read this passage, may we all turn to worship God for the mighty acts He has done throughout history.

God cares for His people, God protects His people, and God provides for His people. Let us each think today of how God has shown His care, protection, and provision in our lives and turn to Him in praise and thanksgiving!

Tuesday, September 20 | Genesis 22 | Elizabeth Helms

In 1887, hymn writer John Sammis penned these words, "Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet, or we'll walk by His side in the way; what He says we will do; where He sends, we will go, never (continued on next page)"



Genesis

WEEK SIX: GENESIS 21-25 SEPTEMBER 19-25

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fear, only trust and obey." This refrain came to mind when reading the story of Abraham being called to sacrifice his promised son, Isaac. What God asks of Abraham is simply to trust and obey.

It is not difficult to see throughout Genesis that Abraham is far from perfect. We've seen account after account of his lack of faith and outright deception. However he is the man God selected as the father of His chosen people. This episode is viewed as the pinnacle of Abraham's journey. This is where his faith is tested. Throughout Scripture there are various accounts of God testing people and it is through these tests that their authentic faith is revealed.

Dr. Ken Mathews writes in his commentary that Abraham chose "the Giver over the gift, relying on the Lord to make good on His promise." Abraham told his son "God will provide," trusting and holding nothing back from God.

From where we sit today, with the full revelation of God's word, we can't read this story without thinking of another time when God provided the sacrifice. We look to the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:32: "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?"

God is trustworthy and deserving of our obedience. Many times the ways we are called to obey won't make sense in our human understanding. Or maybe they will seem impossible. Even in times that following God's commands seem overwhelming, we can confidently walk in obedience knowing that God is working in and through all things to accomplish His purposes for our good, and more importantly, for His glory.

Wednesday, September 21 | Genesis 23 | Elizabeth Helms

The story of Abraham is in one sense coming to a close, but at the same time, it is just beginning. When I first read this chapter, to be completely honest, I found it was quite uninteresting. As I started studying it and doing a little research I discovered that this passage is a beautiful testimony of Abraham's faith.

Abraham diligently seeks out a proper burial place for his wife, Sarah. Furthermore, he diligently seeks out a place in the land of Canaan. This is a bold testimony to his faith that one day his descendants would indeed inhabit this land. God promised to give this land to them. However as Abraham is nearing death, this promise has not yet reached its fulfillment.

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Genesis

WEEK SIX: GENESIS 21-25 SEPTEMBER 19-25

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The writer of Hebrews looks back to the faith of the patriarchs in chapter 11, penning these words: "These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar."

Abraham never personally experienced the days spent dwelling within the promised land. But he exhibited an unwavering faith in the character and promises of God.

We can be encouraged by the faith of Abraham and Sarah. Unanswered prayers often discourage us because by nature we want to see instantaneous results. The life of faith is about placing our faith and hope in things that are unseen (Romans 8:24-25) – walking in trust that our God will be faithful to the end, regardless of how or when He chooses to answer.

Thursday, September 22 | Genesis 24 | Elizabeth Helms

It is easy to be captivated by a good love story. That is probably why almost every movie has at least some element of romance incorporated into the plot. But the love story of Isaac and the search for his bride demonstrate a love that is far deeper than anything captured in the latest romantic comedy. The love we are talking about here is steadfast love.

This is not just any kind of love. In the original language, this phrase carried heavy weight. This is the love that reflects deep loyalty to the covenant promises. As Abraham fades into the background and the next generation takes center stage, this chapter vividly demonstrates the meaning of loyal, covenantal, steadfast love.

This steadfast love is demonstrated on the human level as Abraham dispatches his servant Eliezer to select a wife from his homeland, and then subsequently by Eliezer faithfully completing his task. God's steadfast love is displayed through His divine provision of a wife for Isaac.

God's handiwork is evident in how the details of this encounter fall perfectly into place. Imagine how Eliezer must have felt as he witnessed God at work! Talk about providence! God's presence in this situation is undeniable – Rebekah's father and brother offer their affirmation saying, "The thing has come from the Lord." Lastly, Rebekah, without hesitation, steps out in faith by leaving her family and homeland, much like Abraham did decades before.

God's loyal love that is demonstrated through this passage is the same loyal love that is extended to
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all of His children. It is God's steadfast love that is most fully demonstrated on the cross. His love was poured out through the blood of His son so that we might be reconciled to Him. Let us each give thanks today for the loyal, steadfast love of our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer!

Friday, September 23 | Genesis 25 | Elizabeth Helms

My friends, if we've learned nothing else from Genesis...we have learned at least two things: 1) God is faithful to His promises and 2) God's grace is never based on human merit. This chapter is no different.

The genealogy in the first eighteen verses of this chapter demonstrates God's faithfulness to make Abraham the father of many nations. It is also here that God's promise to Ishmael come to fruition.

In the second half of the chapter, Isaac, the heir to the covenant, and his wife Rebekah face the challenge of infertility. Instead of taking control of their situation like Isaac's parents, they turn to God in prayer. This prayer is answered when God opens her womb and she conceives not one but two sons. The struggle that Rebekah felt when her sons were still in her womb would not stop there. Jacob and Esau's relationship is characterized by enmity and deception from the very beginning. Jacob is filled with jealousy for his brother's inheritance and Esau is so foolish as to trade his birthright for bowl of soup.

And you're telling me this is the guy that is a father of our faith? Jacob, "the deceiver" is the one who will receive blessing from God? Yes. You read that right. This is just the beginning of the story of Jacob and we already see that he is completely undeserving of this blessing.

I don't know about you, but I find myself thankful for these people in the Bible. They were completely undeserving of the grace shown to them by God. Even still, God used them – in mighty ways! These people are by no means worthy to model our lives after; but they are an encouragement. God used sinful people then and He chooses to use sinful people now (hint: that's you and me!).

While the patriarchs were far from perfect, thanks be to God that He did give us a perfect man to follow – Jesus Christ. We can look to the life of Christ and ask God to continue His sanctifying work in our lives so that we can be formed more and more into the image of His Son.

Saturday, September 24-Sunday, September 25 | Genesis 21-25

Reread Genesis 21-25 over the weekend. Reflect on all that God has been saying to you through His word this week.