

Reading Genesis

The Big Picture

Genesis 1-11: God and the whole world

- 1-2: God makes a good world for humanity
- 3-11: Human sin and the ruin of God's world

Genesis 12-50: God and Abraham's family

- 12-25 Abraham
- 26-27 Isaac
- 28-36 Jacob
- 37-50 Joseph

Key Themes in Genesis

1. Yahweh makes a good world and commissions humans to rule and flourish in it (Genesis 1-2)
2. Human sin and rebellion lead to divine judgment and the ruin of human relationships on all levels (Gen 4-11)
3. Yahweh initiates his plan to rescue humanity through his covenant with the family of Abram (Gen 12, 15, 17)
 - Genesis 12:1-3 is a key moment in the unfolding of the biblical story: God is going to bless Abraham so that all nations can receive a blessing
 - The covenant with Abraham includes the promises of...
 - Becoming a nation (12:1, 15:5, 17:1-8)
 - Inheriting the promised land (12:7; 15:17-21)
 - Blessing to all nations (12:3; 22:18)
4. Abraham's family is constantly endangering God's promises through sin and failure
 - Abraham endangers the promises by giving away his wife (Gen 12, 20)
 - Abraham tries to force God's hand to give him a child (Gen 16, 21)
 - Isaac gives away Rebekah (Gen 26)
 - Jacob is a thief and a liar (Gen 25, 27)
 - Joseph's brothers try to kill him (Gen 37)
 - Every generation of Abraham's family is totally dysfunctional!!

Things to look for in reading Genesis:

1. The main plotline in the book: God's desire to bless humanity consistently meets human stubbornness and sin.
 - **Key Word:** keep a record of the words for "bless, blessing" as you read: God wants to pass on a blessing, but humans constantly thwart that blessing.
2. Genesis 12, 15, 17 and the covenant with Abraham are the key to understanding the entire Bible:
 - God is going to rescue the world from sin and corruption and restore blessing through his promises to Abraham.
 - The rest of the biblical story will focus on God's relationship with Israel, because these are the people who bear the promise for the whole world.
 - **Key Words:** Keep track of how the promises to Abraham keep getting repeated and passed on to the next generation and God works out his plan.
3. Find your story in the characters:
 - All of the characters in Genesis struggle with God, and we are meant to find our story in theirs: the characters wrestle with their own sin and failure, doubt and faith, selfishness and generosity as they try to follow God.
 - Use each character's experience (for example, Adam and Eve's temptation, Abraham's struggle with doubt, Jacob's journey from selfishness to trust in God) to find parallels with your own journey with God.
4. God's faithfulness: notice how many times God rescues people, or stays committed to blessing humanity. Allow Genesis to reshape your ideas of what it means for God to be faithful to you.