



Genesis 12-50

Transcript

Introduction

00:00-00:31

The book of Genesis. In the first video, we saw how chapters 1-11 set up the basic storyline of the Bible. God has created all things, and he makes humans in his image to rule the world on his behalf. The humans choose sin and rebellion, and so the world spins out of control into violence and death, all leading up to the rebellion and scattering of the people in Babylon. And so the big question is, what is God going to do to rescue and redeem his world?

Chapters 12-14

00:32-02:20

Well, out of that scattering at Babylon, the author traces a genealogy of just one family that leads eventually to a man named Abram, later known as Abraham. And God's promise to Abraham at the beginning of chapter 12 opens up a whole new movement in the story.

God calls Abraham to leave his home and go to the land of Canaan, which God says will become his one day. And in that land, God promises to make Abraham into a great nation, to make his name great, and to bless him. Now, these promises are connected back to earlier parts of the book. So Babylon had arrogantly tried to make a great name for itself, and that didn't go over very well. But God, in his generosity, is going to bestow a great name on this no-name guy, Abraham. And God's blessing of Abraham echoes all the way back to that original blessing God gave humanity in the beginning.

So the question is, why is God going to bless Abraham and his family? And the last line of God's promise makes this clear: "So that all the families of the earth will find God's blessing in you." Now, this is key for understanding the whole rest of the biblical story. God's plan is to rescue and bless his rebellious world through

Abraham's family, and this is why the whole rest of the Old Testament story is just going to focus on this one family, eventually called the people of Israel. This is also why Israel will later be called "a kingdom of priests" at Mount Sinai. God wants to use them to show all of the other nations what he's like. And ultimately this is the promise that gets picked up by the later biblical prophets and poets who say that its fulfillment will come through Israel's messianic king, whose reign will bring justice and peace to all of the nations.

Now, at this point of the story, none of that's clear. You just have to keep reading and watch the promise develop.

Chapters 15-26

02:21-04:20

And so the rest of the book focuses on Abraham and his family. First, Abraham himself, then his son Isaac, and then his son Jacob, and then Jacob's 12 sons. And the stories about each generation, they're united by two main themes.

So first, each generation of Abraham's family is marked by repeated failure. They just keep making really bad decisions that mess up their lives and that put God's promise in jeopardy. However, God remains faithful to them. He keeps rescuing them from themselves and reaffirming his commitment to bless them and bless the nations through them despite their failings.

So the Abraham stories. God had promised Abraham a huge family, but on two different occasions, he's afraid for his life because other men are attracted to his wife. And so he denies that he's even married to her, which creates, of course, all of these problems. And not only that, Abraham and his wife Sarah, they can't have children. And so Sarah arranges for Abraham to sleep with one of their servant girls, which also creates all of these problems in the family.

But each time, God bails Abraham out. And in chapters 15 and 17, God even formalizes his promise to Abraham with an official commitment called a covenant. This is a classic scene. God invites Abraham to look up at the night stars and to count them. And he says that's how numerous your family's going to be. And despite all of the odds—having no kids and no way to have any at the moment—Abraham looks up in the sky and simply trusts God's promise. And God responds by entering into a covenant with Abraham, promising that he will become a father of many nations, that God's blessing may come to the whole world.

God asked Abraham to mark his family with a sign of the covenant: circumcision of all the male boys in the family. This is a symbol to remind them that the fruitfulness of their family is a gift from God. And so Abraham has lots of kids eventually, and he dies at a good old age.

Chapters 27-36

04:20-05:18

Now, the Jacob stories play out these themes even more dramatically. From birth, Jacob lives up to the meaning of his name, which is “deceiver.” He cheats his brother Esau out of his inheritance and blessing, and he does it by deceiving his old, blind father no less. And then he just takes off.

He goes on to take four wives even though he really only loves one, Rachel, and this creates all of these rivalries in the family. The only thing that humbles Jacob is being deceived by his uncle Laban, who cheats him out of years of his life. The tables have finally turned.

And so it’s a humbled Jacob that returns to his homeland. And in a very strange story, Jacob ends up wrestling with God as he demands that God bless him. Some things never really change, do they? However, God honors his determination, and he passes Abraham’s blessing on to him. And he renames Jacob as Israel, which means “wrestles with God.”

Chapters 37-50

05:19-07:48

Now, it’s this last part of the book—the story of Jacob’s sons—where all the themes come to a head. Jacob loves his second-to-youngest son, Joseph, more than any of the others, and he gives him this special jacket. And the 10 older sons come to hate Joseph. And so they kidnap him. And they plan to kill him, but instead they decide to just sell him into slavery in Egypt where he ends up in prison. Talk about family failure.

But God is with Joseph, and he orchestrates Joseph’s release from prison. And Pharaoh ends up elevating Joseph to second-in-command over all of Egypt. And so Joseph saves the nation of Egypt during a famine, and he also ends up saving his brothers and his family from starving to death.

And so once again, we can see the folly and the sin of Abraham’s family is met with God’s faithfulness, who subverts even the evil of the brothers into an occasion to save life. And this is actually what Joseph says right near the end of the book. He says to his brothers, “You all planned this for evil, but God planned it for good, to save many lives.” Now these words are strategically placed at the end of the book because they summarize not only the story of Joseph and his brothers, but the book as a whole.

From Genesis 3 onward, humans keep acting selfishly and doing evil, but this God is not going to leave his world to its own devices. He remains faithful and determined to bless people despite their failures. You can see this especially in how that mysterious promise about the descendant of the woman gets developed

throughout the book. So remember, Genesis 3, God promised that this wounded victor would come and crush the snake and defeat evil at its source. And the author then connects this promise directly to the line of Abraham. This is a part of how God's going to bring his blessing to the nations.

Now from Abraham, this promise gets connected to Judah, the fourth son of Jacob. And this is how: In an extremely important poem in chapter 49, an aging Jacob, he's on his deathbed, he wants to bless his 12 sons. And when he comes to Judah, Jacob predicts that Judah will become the tribe of Israel's royal leaders and that one day a king will come who will command the obedience of all the nations and fulfill God's promise to restore the garden blessing to all of the world.

And then after this, Jacob dies. And later Joseph dies too, and the growing family remains in Egypt.

Conclusion

07:49-08:08

And so the book of Genesis ends with all of these future hopes and promises left hanging and undeveloped, and it forces you to turn the page to see how it's all going to turn out. But for now, that's the book of Genesis.