

## *Importance of Genesis 1-12*

My friends enjoy teasing me for my love of the Old Testament book of Genesis. Of course I'd be fibbing if I said it isn't without warrant. It never seems to take me too long to reference back to this great book in any conversation about the Bible. I have found that Genesis explains why we see breathtaking beauty in the world side by side with heart wrenching ugliness, why we experience great moments of fulfillment and yet have a nagging sense of frustration and longing. It begins shaping our answers to the big questions of life about origins and meaning. It explains why we are the way we are, and whether we can cling to hope and dream for things to get better. And tucked away in its early chapters is a massive promise pointing towards where the whole story is headed. It's nothing short of the gospel, the royal proclamation of good news. I do not think I am claiming too much in suggesting all of human destiny and the trajectory for the cosmos is wrapped up in it. But most of all, the book of Genesis is the beginning of our story with God.

One of my theses of this study is that in order to understand the rest of the story (i.e. the Bible) and where it's headed, you need to know where it began. Maybe you've heard the old adage, "You can't know where you're going unless you know where you've been." Same thing applies here. Or think about the last great movie you saw and had to tell a friend to go check out. Did you say, "Hey, I saw a great flick and you have to see it! Oh...but don't worry about starting at the beginning, just fast forward and start in the middle of the film." Probably not. I don't know of anybody who does that. Again, similar thing with the Bible. Sure, God still speaks no matter where we pick up in the story. I can recount many stories of people opening a Bible for their very first time starting in the smack dab middle of the story, in what we usually call the Gospels, and have seen God's Spirit work through it in profound ways. That's the cool thing

about having the same Spirit in us as the Spirit who inspired the Bible's message. Every time we pick it up, we ought to get something out of it, even in those times when maybe it doesn't seem so in that particular moment (remember the story of the dancing rabbis?).

I'm convinced, however, starting at the beginning will make the Bible's message come even more alive - like moving from reading the story in black in white to seeing it in full color. There are simply no substitutes for knowing where the story began, especially when it comes to understanding the Bible's context and God's mission for the world, why Jesus came, and what He has in mind for each of us. That's why we are taking a little more time to focus on just these first few opening chapters.

### *Why Genesis 1:1 through Genesis 12:1-3?*

The first eleven chapters of Genesis form a unified literary unit culminating in the call of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. As we said in the Bible overview, Genesis 12:1-3 lays the theological blueprint for the rest of Scripture. Because of the way many of us have been taught to read the Bible, or never been taught at all, we miss picking up on the relationship of these first chapters to one another and the rest of Scripture. There are even scholars who see the first twelve chapters as stories that have merely been cut and pasted together without a real sense of unity. But if you've been paying attention in our study so far, you already know better. Everything is connected!

Think of these first twelve chapters this way: they are like a jigsaw puzzle where all of its pieces are needed to fully understand the whole. Now I'm not a big fan of jigsaw puzzles. But I just so happened to have married into a family where this is there thing. Thank goodness its not their only thing! But every summer on family vacation

a new puzzle seems to magically appear with its array of colorful pieces. On a small minority of the individual pieces you can make out what they depict and imagine their contribution to the whole picture. But most of the pieces as they stand alone amount to little more than oddly shaped mosaics with no discernable image. They are in need of their neighboring pieces before forming a complete picture.

The stories in Genesis 1-12, such as Creation, Cain and Able, Noah and the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and the Call of Abraham, are a lot like jigsaw puzzle pieces. On their own they may appear as little more than oddly shaped stories with rough edges. But as we pay attention to their words, themes, images, and literary features, we'll come to discover they snugly fit together forming a cohesive picture and narrative flow.

I would describe that flow as follows: Genesis 1 and 2 show us God's ideal for creation and His creatures offering us a glimpse into what life is supposed to look like free of sin. Throughout Scripture they serve as a paradigm for understanding what God desires for our own lives as He redeems us. Genesis 3 through 11 provide insight into the human dilemma and why life often falls short of the beauty of Genesis 1-2. Genesis 12:1-3 is God's solution to the problems of Genesis 3-11 and details His plan to get all of creation back to the "very good" of Genesis 1-2. In fact, the rest of Scripture, all the way to the last chapter of the story in Revelation 22, is concerned with the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. And when viewed together in light of their unity, these first twelve chapters form the foundation for the rest of the Bible.

The question I most often get when explaining that the first twelve chapters of Genesis are some of the most important in all of Scripture is, “But what about Jesus and the Gospels? Aren’t those the most important? Shouldn’t we start there?”

Yes! Jesus is the climax of the entire story. But that is exactly the point. Jesus is the climax to a story that has already been in progress when He arrives on the stage of history as a newborn. He doesn’t show up in a vacuum devoid of historical context. The first gospel begins by connecting Jesus to the promises made to Abraham. Jesus himself understands His mission in terms of God’s faithfulness to the promises made to Abraham and Israel. And have you ever noticed how much the New Testament authors talk about Abraham? Abraham is mentioned by Paul more than any other Old Testament character. Paul even says that you are and I are heirs to the promises made to Abraham and that when we proclaim Jesus as Lord and King, we become part of Abraham’s family. That’s a whole lot of Abrahams in one paragraph! Hopefully you get the point. Our relationship to God in Jesus empowered by the Spirit has much to do with Abraham and being part of his world-wide family.

It should be of little wonder, then, that if we fail to read the narratives of Jesus’ ministry in relationship to the front end of the story, we risk missing out on the fullness of who Jesus is and what He came to accomplish. We may even miss out on what He wants to accomplish through us. At worst, we risk reading into Jesus our own ideas of who He is and come up with our own gospels. And if you and I are heirs to the promises made to Abraham, wouldn’t you want to know what the promises are and how they apply to us?

By cooperating with Jesus and the New Testament authors and answering their invitation to view Jesus’ life and teachings through the interpretive grids of Genesis

1:1-12:1-3, and view His actions in light of God's ancient promises to Abraham and Israel, we are on our way to becoming good readers of the Bible and finding our place in the story.

### *Summary Points*

- To understand the story of the Bible and find our place in it, we need to know how and where the story began.
- The promises God makes to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 are the theological blueprint for the rest of Scripture.
- Jesus came to fulfill the promises made to Abraham and when we confess and believe Jesus is Lord, we become heirs to those promises and part of Abraham's family.
- To understand our place in the story and play our parts well, we need to understand the promises made to Abraham and how they apply to us.
- To understand God's promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, we need to understand what came before. That is, we need to know how Genesis 12:1-3 relates to Genesis 3-11, and how Genesis 3-11 relates to Genesis 1-2.
- Genesis 1-2 shows a glimpse of God's design for a good world before sin and evil. Genesis 3-11 tells of the human rebellion and shows the devastating affects of sin. Genesis 12:1-3 is God's plan for reversing the effects of Genesis 3-11 to get us back to the "very good" creation of Genesis 1-2.
- When read together, these first twelve chapters of Genesis form a cohesive storyline and are foundational for understanding the rest of Scripture and God's goal for creation and humanity.