

# Threads

*tracing the eternal gospel  
through the old testament*

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*Then Jesus took them through the writings of  
Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the  
Scriptures the things concerning himself.*

**Luke 24:27** (NLT)

**ml**  
matthias' lot church

loving him  
& loving his.

**threads: tracing the eternal gospel through the old testament**

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# can we understand the bible?

## why read the bible?

The Bible is one book made up of 66 smaller books; within these books are historical narratives, prayers, instructions, prophecies, wisdom, and praise. The whole Bible was written in a span of over 1500 years, so **it can seem that the stories are disconnected from one another and irrelevant to us**—but nothing could be further from the truth.

Scripture weaves together one overarching story through which we can better understand the individual events and accounts detailed throughout its pages. The Bible was written by many different people, but ultimately has **one divine author revealing his cohesive story of redemption**.

God speaks to us through his word. Unfortunately, some people do not read it because they find it confusing and give up out of discouragement. But God desires for us to understand his word and through it, know him. **The truth is we cannot love a God we don't know, and we can never truly know God apart from his word.**

In the Bible, God reveals to us both his limitless character and the detailed unfolding of his eternal plan to rescue and redeem his people from the power of sin and death by giving us new life in his Son, Jesus.

*All Scripture is **breathed out by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

**2 Timothy 3:16-17**

## how do we read the bible?

Since we come to know God *through* his word, we must regularly meet with him *in* his word.

So how can we intentionally engage our minds and hearts as we read the Scriptures?

- **Begin with prayer**—we cannot understand God's word apart from the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit; therefore, it is wise to always begin your time in the word with prayer. **Ask the Spirit to open your mind and heart** to understand what you are reading and to help you live in worshipful obedience to his voice.
- **Have a holy curiosity**—we will never exhaust the depths of who God is; **there is always more to discover**. So as you read, allow yourself to have a holy curiosity: ask a lot of questions, go to God with those thoughts, listen for his voice, and be content with not always getting every answer.
- **Focus on God**—since the Bible is all God's story, **it is important to not lose sight of God while reading**. Our study of his word should never lead to mere head knowledge, rather it is how we can truly know and worship our Creator.

## why does it matter that the bible is telling one story?

Every story in the Bible was intentionally included by the divine Author, which means **every word and phrase has value and meaning**. Once you see the overarching story of Scripture, reading the Bible becomes a deep dive into the riches of God's unparalleled creativity, his endless mercy, and his steadfast love for his people.

The one story of God is the one eternal plan of God for the redemption and adoption of his people in his one Son. **Jesus is the one to whom every story points**. In him we find all the wisdom and promises of God.

**The stories of Scripture are historically true as well as spiritually significant**. As you familiarize yourself with these narratives, you will be better able to read each verse in the context of that particular story—while also placing it in the overarching story of the entire Bible.

**Every believer, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is invited to read and understand God's unchanging word**. The more we study the Bible and process its truths with others, the more we will understand which will lead to increased confidence when we read and increased desire to hear from the Lord in his word.

## what is the story?

Scripture tells one overarching story of a faithful God who pursues his people relentlessly—**literally moving heaven and earth to dwell with those who are his**. From the beginning of time, he purposed to create a people for his own possession. However, Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, fracturing creation and our access to a holy God.

God, in his steadfast love, determined to reconcile us to himself and redeem our lives for his name's sake. **He promises that one day all things will be made new** as evil is put to death, and we are able to live in the presence of our Savior for all eternity.

Scripture recounts stories of many people who were used mightily by God, showed steadfast faith, and followed God with their lives, but ultimately they were all sinful humans just like us. They are not simply heroes we are to imitate, but rather **shadows of the promised greater one who was to come**. They all serve to show us our need for a better mediator, a truer prophet, a holier priest, a wholly perfect king.

The narrative of Scripture moves from creation to the fall of Adam and Eve, followed by centuries of God promising a coming redemption which is fulfilled in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. However, **that is not the end of the story**.

**We, too, find our stories in the grander story God is still writing**. In the end, we are promised that he will be faithful to restore all things to their intended perfect design in the creation of the new heavens and the new earth. Our King Jesus will eternally dwell with all his people—which has been his divine plan since before time began.

***creation → fall → redemption → restoration: the story of the Bible***

# why read the old testament?

The writings of the Old Testament start at the beginning of time—very literally “*in the beginning*”—and follow the story of God and his people until about 400 years before the birth of Christ.

It is inaccurate to interpret *old* to mean *outdated* or *irrelevant*. In fact, **these Scriptures are fundamental to us as believers**. The Old Testament contains the Scriptures that were used by the New Testament believers, the apostles, and by Jesus himself. In fact, the New Testament quotes the Old Testament close to 300 times, and if we include where the New Testament alludes to the Old Testament, that number jumps to nearly 1,000.

**Reading and understanding the Old Testament is essential to understanding the New Testament.** The New Testament is not a replacement for the old—rather it is a continuation of the one story God has been writing since time began.

Within the pages of the Old Testament, we learn about...

- the creation of the world
- the formation of God’s people
- their obedience and disobedience
- their deliverance and conquest of the land
- the history of the judges
- the lineage of the kings and kingdoms
- the exile and return
- the prophecies of the coming Messiah

...and most importantly, we learn about God. **It is in the Old Testament where we begin to see and know the character of our unchanging God.**

And he is still writing his story in our lives today. As his children, we are a part of his ongoing purpose to rescue and redeem his people and bring glory to his name.

So we read the Old Testament as a book written about God that we may know and worship him more. The story of God was not just written for the believers of old—**it was written for us, too.**

*For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

**Romans 15:4**





# Threads

## the beginnings

### genesis

As you interact with the Scriptures in each section, keep these three questions at the forefront of your mind:

- » *What **observations** have you made while reading this Scripture?*
- » *What **questions** come to mind as you continue to process what you've read?*
- » *What do you see about God that causes your heart to **worship**?*

# creation

*read:* Genesis 1-2

God is **limitless**—he is outside of time and space and is not constrained by anything ever.  
God is **eternal**—he is self-existing from eternity past to eternity future.  
God is **omnipresent**—he is fully present everywhere at all times.

...so when the word of God opens with the phrase “*in the beginning*,” these three profound words mark the beginning of time itself.

- » *What comes to mind as you consider that there was a time when time did not exist and that God has eternally existed outside of time?*
- » *What does it mean for your daily life that this is still true of God today?*

Many different narratives exist about how the world came to be, but only one is true.

**Our God is a masterful creator!** He created the world and everything in it out of nothing—he needed absolutely nothing outside of himself to create the universe. Additionally, **he did not create out of any need that existed in himself**—he has eternally been self-existing and self-fulfilling (**Acts 17:24-25**).

- » *Why would God have chosen to create anything?*
- » *God spoke the world into existence; what does this say about the power of God’s word—both spoken and written?*
- » *Who is present at creation according to **Genesis 1:1-3**?*

**Our Creator is flawlessly intentional in all his ways.** He values process and creates nothing haphazardly or for no purpose. As you read the creation account in **Genesis 1:1-26**, think about the following questions:

- » *Where do you notice God’s divine intentionality?*
- » *Why might God have taken time to create when he could have effortlessly spoken everything into existence instantaneously?*
- » *What does the creation account reveal about God’s character, and how does that lead you to worship?*

*Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”*

**Revelation 4:11**

Through the first six days, we see a pattern: God speaks creation into existence and Scripture closes each day with “*and there was evening and there was morning, the \_\_\_\_ day.*” In **Genesis 2:1-3**, this rhythm changes.

- » *What happens on the seventh day and how is it different from days one through six?*
- » *Why do you think day seven is included in the creation narrative? What might God intend for us to learn about him and his desire for us?*

# creation of mankind

*re-read: Genesis 1:26-31; 2:4-25*

**Genesis 2** is not a new creation account but rather a ground-level and more descriptive view of how God created. It is important to keep in mind when reading Scripture that **God is not as interested in a chronological narrative of events as he is the message being conveyed.**

The pinnacle of God's creation comes on the sixth day. In these Scriptures, we are given a glimpse into the divine dialogue of the triune God concerning the creation of man and woman.

- » *Even though Adam has fellowship with God, why does God state that it is not good for Adam to be alone?*
- » *What could have been the reason God waits to create Eve until after Adam names all the animals? What is Adam celebrating when he finally sees Eve?*
- » *What does it mean to be made in God's image?*

God creates his image bearers and gives them what is often referred to as the *creation mandate*: **be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over every living thing on the earth.** They are to fill the earth with more image bearers who would rule over the world as ambassadors of the Creator God who is ruler over all.

- » *What are the implications of the creation mandate for us today?*

## seeing Jesus

Jesus is the perfect image of God who came to redeem imperfect image bearers (**Colossians 1:15-20**). As God opened Adam's side and used his rib to create his bride, Eve, so too in the crucifixion, Christ's side was pierced as he gave his life for the creation of his bride, the church (**John 19:34; Ephesians 5:25-27**).

From eternity past, before he came to earth as the man Jesus, the Son of God has eternally existed (**John 17:5**). He has always been both present and active in all of creation (**John 1:1-5**). God creates everything out of nothing in six days and then he rests on the seventh day as both a pattern and an invitation for us to cease from work and rest in him. This rest begins the moment we come to Christ by faith—and he will be for us our eternal seventh-day rest (**Matthew 11:28-30**).

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# the fall

*read:* Genesis 3

Everything that God created was good and pure and beautiful. There was no fear or pain or death. Adam and Eve had unhindered intimacy with their Lord God in the perfect world and lavish garden he had prepared for them. It was all theirs to care for and enjoy. There was only one condition: **they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**

- » *Pause and imagine what it must have been like to live in this sinless world as a sinless individual.*
- » *Why did God place the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden?*
- » *Why would God not want them to have knowledge of good and evil?*

In the very first verse of this chapter, we are introduced to a new character: the serpent. We are told in the book of Revelation that this serpent is none other than Satan himself (**Revelation 12:9**). Satan is God's enemy, and as image bearers of God, he is our enemy as well.

- » *What is Satan trying to accomplish in his conversation with Eve?*
- » *Why do they believe the enemy over what God said?*
- » *Satan has not changed his tactics: in what ways is he tempting you to doubt God and his word?*

Although Eve is the first to eat of the fruit, throughout Scripture Adam bears the responsibility for original sin, due in part to his passivity. Immediately, they begin to experience shame and fear and rivalry—things they had never known before. **They feel the need to hide**, from both each other and the Lord. But the Lord is not unaware of what they had done, and he comes to them.

- » *God is all-knowing, so why does he come to Adam and Eve with questions?*
  - » *What do their responses reveal about their now-sinful hearts?*
  - » *How has God pursued you in your sin?*
- Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him...do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord.*
- Jeremiah 23:24**

Thankfully, the Lord does not let us hide; he confronts us in our sin and pursues us with his love and grace. **God is eternally unchanging**, so this is how he responds to Adam and Eve as well—he addresses their sin and responds with the resulting consequences.

- » *Reflect on **Genesis 3:14-19** and ask God to reveal the far-reaching effects of these consequences and the depths of his grace which are so often overlooked in this passage.*
- » *God tells them that if they eat of the forbidden tree they will die, yet we see them still living after their disobedience. What does God mean by "die?"*



# cain and abel

*read:* **Genesis 4:1-16**

Sin enters God's story and he removes Adam and Eve from the garden—this is not punishment, but **his grace towards humanity**. In his grace, he keeps them from eating of the tree of life and therefore living forever in their sinful state separated from intimate relationship with him.

Mercifully, he does not leave them; he covers their nakedness and ushers them out of the garden with a beautiful promise: **the offspring of the woman would crush the serpent**. However, he did not give them a timeline for this promise.

- » *Considering the promise of **Genesis 3:15**, what assumptions might Eve be making with the birth of her first son?*

Cain is the first son ever born on earth. After him, Eve gives birth to a second son, Abel. While they are brothers, they are also very different individuals—Abel is a shepherd; Cain cultivates the ground.

- » *Out of their own labors, they each bring an offering to the Lord. What differences do you observe in what and how they give?*
- » *What could have been the reason God does not accept Cain's offering?*
- » *Read **Hebrews 11:4** and **1 John 3:12**. What do these New Testament references reveal about Cain?*

**Cain does not heed the Lord's warning** and instead satiates his anger with the murder of his brother.

- » *What do you notice about the posture of Cain's heart toward God compared to God's heart for Cain?*
- » *What similarities can you see between **Genesis 4:9-16** and **Genesis 3:9-24**?*
- » *How might Cain's murder of Abel serve Satan's purposes?*

*But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

**James 1:14-15**

Embittered by the consequences of his sin, Cain objects that he will be killed by others. However, God promises to protect him even as he removes him from the fertile ground he has worked all his life.

*For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*

**2 Corinthians 7:10**

- » *What do you learn about God's character from how he interacts with Cain?*
- » *Notice all the ways Cain responds to God. What can we learn about genuine confession and repentance?*
- » *Consider with the Lord what motivates you to confess sin and whether it leads you to true repentance.*



# noah and the ark

*read:* Genesis 6-7

Many generations later, it becomes clear that the promised Son is not going to come directly from Eve. **The Lord is about his perfect timing** and teaching his children to wait expectantly on him.

Evil extends to every corner of the earth, and ten generations (1,000+ years) from the beginning of time, people have rejected God altogether and instead are running after their own evil desires. This was not what God desired for his image bearers; **they were to reflect him and his character, not emulate the enemy.**

- » *Imagine being God and seeing your image bearers give their lives over to evil (**Genesis 6:1-7**). Why might God have chosen the destruction of mankind as the appropriate judgment at this time?*

In the garden of Eden, the serpent convinced Eve to eat the fruit—she saw that it was good and so she took (**Genesis 3:6**). In this passage, the sons of God see that the daughters of man are attractive (the Hebrew word *ṣōḇ* = good) and so they take (**Genesis 6:2**).

- » *How might Satan be using these unholy unions as an attempt to thwart God's redemptive plan?*

God determines to flood the earth as judgment for the rampant evil. Every living thing will be lost in this judgment except those whom God chooses to save in the ark. Out of all the people on the earth, there is only one man who finds favor in the eyes of the Lord. **Noah and his family will be the only surviving members of humanity, and the ark will be their means of salvation.**

- » *Why doesn't God destroy all living things—both humans and animals—and start over?*
- » *What about Noah sets him apart from those around him?*
- » *God's command to Noah makes no earthly sense. What are some things God asks of us that make no sense from a human perspective?*

God's plan for deliverance will require extraordinary faith and obedience from Noah. Not only is he told to build an ark, but it is to be built according to very detailed specifications. **It would need to withstand a worldwide flood**, but it would also need to house a male and female of every animal on earth, plus the animals required for sacrifices.

We are given no indication as to what Noah did for the first 500 years of his life, but **he became an architect and an animal keeper at the Lord's command.**

- » *What do you observe about the conversations between God and Noah?*
- » *Imagine watching God bring all the necessary animals to the ark: when has your faith been strengthened by seeing God do the seemingly impossible?*

## the flood

*read:* **Genesis 8-9**

Finally, the time comes. The ark is completed, the chosen animals are inside, and Noah and his family are safely on board. **God closes and seals the one and only door to the ark.** Then the waters begin to fall from the heavens and burst forth from the earth. This continues for 40 days and 40 nights until all the earth is under water and every living thing has perished except those inside the ark.

- » *Put yourself in the ark and imagine the horror of the surrounding situation. What would be your response toward God?*
- » *In what ways does the ark symbolize our salvation?*
- » *Pause and contemplate all that God has saved you from—both now and for eternity—and thank him for his grace in your salvation.*

Five months after the flood begins, the water subsides enough for the ark to **come to rest on the mountains of Ararat.** Yet it will be several more months until those in the ark can finally exit onto dry land at God's command. In total, they will have been in the ark for a little over a year (**Genesis 7:11, Genesis 8:13-14**).

*In Hebrew, "Ararat" means the reverse of the curse.*

- » *Imagine the world Noah beholds as he walks out of the ark. Why might Noah render burnt offerings to God as he begins his new life on dry ground?*
- » *What are the details of the covenant God makes with creation, Noah, and every living thing in **Genesis 9:8-17**?*
- » *Read **Genesis 6:5** and **8:21-22**: what is clear about the condition of man's heart, and what does God's response show you about his character?*

## seeing Jesus

As a result of sin, the world is corrupt and headed for destruction (**2 Peter 3:1-7**). The judgment of the flood can seem cruel; however, it is in the severe mercy of God that he puts an end to humanity's inevitable descent into evil chaos. God will further his redemptive plan with his chosen servant Noah, who is a shadow of the chosen Servant to come (**Mark 10:45**).

We also see God's severe mercy at the foot of the cross. At the cross of Christ, we receive the mercy of God in the severity of Christ's crucifixion (**Isaiah 53:10**).

Noah's only hope for survival was to follow God obediently into the ark; our only hope is to find refuge in the only one who can save us. Jesus is the ark—the one who has reversed the curse of sin by becoming a curse for us (**Galatians 3:13**)—and if we are *in him* we have no reason to fear the coming wrath of God. Those who have taken refuge in him will forever be safe (**1 Thessalonians 5:9-11**).

*Just as it was in the days of Noah,  
so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.*

**Luke 17:26**

# the tower of babel

*read:* Genesis 11:1-9

As recorded in **Genesis 9:18-29**, Noah lives another 350 years after the flood. Yet the only thing God tells us is that Noah plants a vineyard, gets drunk on the wine, and his son Ham sins against him. Ham's sin elicits a prophetic curse on his son Canaan from the mouth of Noah—who also pronounces prophetic blessings on his sons Japheth and Shem.

- » *Why might this be the only story about Noah's last 350 years that God chooses to include in his word?*

These sons have children of their own, and **through one family, human beings once again begin to fill the earth**. Inevitably, these people are sinful just as humanity has been since **Genesis 3**. There is no escaping this shared reality; people are sinful and consequently regularly rely on themselves over trusting God.

About 100 years after the flood, despite God's promises and with the knowledge of God's worldwide judgment not far from their minds, the people declare that they will build a tower to the heavens. This occurs in spite of God's recurring command to his people: "*be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*" (**Genesis 9:1**).

- » *What reasons may have fueled the people's determination to build this tower?*
- » *What fears or desires frequently motivate you?*
- » *Why might God be so adamant that these people fill the earth, and how is this command still relevant to the church today?*

*In ancient times, bitumen, a tar-like substance, was often used as a waterproof sealant.*

God not only sees their active construction, but more importantly, **he sees the wickedness in their hearts**. Much like in **Genesis 1:26**, we get the privilege of a glimpse behind the curtain into the heavenly discourse of the triune God.

- » *Why does God declare their unity is a problem?*
- » *What does this account reveal to you about the character of God and his desires for his people?*

*In Hebrew, "Babel" means confusion.*

**Our God is not distant.** He did not create and then walk away. Throughout Scripture, we repeatedly read of God "*coming down*"—both in discipline and in love. In this account, he comes down to confuse their language and put an end to their idolatrous pursuit. Suddenly, what had been a peaceful and powerful collaborative effort, becomes an impossibly chaotic and frustrating project.

- » *What are the implications of God's strategic discipline in confusing their speech?*
- » *How do God's actions toward these people display his mercy?*



# God calls abram

*read:* Genesis 12:1-9

A few hundred years after the people had been dispersed from Babel, the biblical narrative narrows in on one man through whom the promised Son would come—the **Son who would crush the serpent's head** (**Genesis 3:15**).

When we begin to follow Abram, he is 75 years old and living in Haran. Before coming to Haran, he was called by God out of the land of Ur (**Acts 7:2-4**). We also know from Scripture that he descends from Noah's son Shem and that he marries a woman named Sarai who is barren. **He is a pagan man living in polytheistic culture worshiping false gods and idols** (**Joshua 24:2**).

*Canaan is the promised land that would one day be known as Israel.*

- » *In what ways is your story similar to Abram's: What was the focus of your life when God called you—or what did he save you from worshiping because he called you to himself when you were young?*

**He is not searching for God, but God chooses him** despite knowing fully how Abram would repeatedly choose to disobey.

God commands Abram to go...to leave his land, his family, and everything he's ever known to go to a location that was yet to be revealed.

- » *What are the promises God makes to Abram?*
- » *How do these promises point to the gospel? How does **Galatians 3:8-9** confirm this?*
- » *Think back to the story of Babel: what similarities and differences do you see in Abram's story here? (**Hebrews 11:8-10**)*

## God's covenant with abram

*read:* Genesis 15

Abram's relationship with God involves ongoing dialogue; **Abram knows the voice of God**. This particular interchange begins with the first recorded command from God to "fear not."

- » *Why might God start with this phrase? What does Abram have to fear?*
- » *What about the character of God keeps you from fear or helps you in your fear?*

God makes Abram no small promise when he vows to make him into a great nation. God promises abundance, but Abram understandably questions how God will accomplish this and focuses on his circumstances instead of God's ability to keep his word.

- » *How does God address Abram's uncertainty?*
- » *When have you doubted God's ability to fulfill his promises, and how can your doubts drive you to the Lord?*

**There exists a valid tension between trusting God while also bringing him our questions.** In his gracious response, God not only assures Abram that he will have a son of his own, but he gives him a visual to help him grasp the enormity of his promise. Imagine God’s love for and patience with Abram as he illuminates his ignorance. **And Abram “believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).**

- » *What does Abram do to be considered righteous by God? What does this mean for you and your own relationship with God?*
- » *What does it mean to “believe” God?*

**Abram believes God, yet asks for reassurance.** In ancient Near Eastern cultures, the sealing of a covenant often involved a cutting ceremony—sacrificial animals would be cut in two and the participants would walk between the carcasses. This symbolized a grave reality: if one were to break the covenant, he would meet a similar fate.

- » *Who is the smoking pot and the flaming torch in this scene?*
- » *What is Abram’s role in this covenant-cutting ceremony?*
- » *What is God showing Abram and us about being in a covenantal relationship with him?*

God is faithful to the covenant he begins, and the responsibility to uphold this covenant falls completely on him alone. **Knowing Abram—and we along with him—could never remain faithful to this covenant, in this ceremony, God is declaring his own Son’s death.**

## *seeing Jesus*

As is true with our salvation, God initiated his covenant with Abram based on his own eternal plan and not on anything Abram had done. God is *always* the initiator (**Ephesians 1:3-5**). God made a blood covenant with Abram out of love and for his own divine purposes.

He covenants himself to us through the promised offspring of Abram—Jesus—who took Abram’s place in the covenant ceremony by pledging his life in exchange for humanity’s unfaithfulness (**Galatians 3:16-18, 26-29**). We are sinful people who could never keep our end of the covenant; therefore, God eternally upholds both ends of the covenant by means of Christ’s blood (**Hebrews 9:11-14**).

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# the God who sees

*read:* **Genesis 16**

Waiting can be excruciating and can cause us to forget the grandeur and character of God. God had promised Abram innumerable descendants, but there are three perceived obstacles to this plan: Abram has no children, his wife is barren, and they are both very old. At this point, **it has been at least 10 years since God first made this promise to him.**

- » *Imagine being Abram, Sarai, and Hagar: what could they be thinking and feeling, and what mistakes do they each make?*
- » *Where do you see parallels between this chapter and the fall narrative in **Genesis 3**?*

*Here I have seen  
one who sees me!*

**Genesis 16:13** (NET)

Hagar flees to the wilderness where she is met by the angel of the Lord—his first appearance recorded in Scripture.. He gives her a promise similar to Abram’s and announces that she is to name her son Ishmael. In response, Hagar becomes the first person we see give the Lord a name: *“the God who sees.”*

- » *Who is the angel of the Lord, and what does this interaction reveal about God’s heart for Hagar?*
- » *What does God declare about her situation, and why might that make her feel seen by him?*
- » *How have you felt seen by God recently? How has that impacted your faith?*

## the sign of the covenant

*read:* **Genesis 17:1–18:15**

Thirteen years have passed since the last recorded word from the Lord. Ishmael is now a young teen and likely Abram assumes he is the son God had promised. However, **the Lord again appears to Abram**, now called Abraham, with an expanded revelation of the promise he had given him 25 years earlier. Abraham is 99 years old, yet God promises very specifically that Sarah will give birth to a son a year later whom they are to name Isaac.

- » *What are the additional details God gives about the covenantal promises? (Compare **Genesis 12:1–3** and **17:4–8**)*
- » *God gives both Abram and Sarai new names; what is the significance of God renaming individuals?*

In this exchange between Abraham and God, God imposes one requirement on Abraham and his people: every male must be circumcised as a reminder of the covenant God made with Abraham. Abraham is obedient to this painful and unprecedented command of the Lord—as **the Lord had cut covenant with Abraham, so Abraham is to cut covenant with the Lord**, both he and all the males in his household throughout all generations.

- » *Although Abraham cries out to the Lord on behalf of Ishmael, why could Ishmael never be the son promised to Abraham?*



# isaac

*read:* Genesis 21:1-21

**God is always faithful to his promises.** He especially enjoys working in the seemingly impossible. It's been over 25 years since Abraham was first visited by the Lord; now, at the age of 100, he holds his baby boy, Isaac. His waiting has ended; his faith has become sight.

- » *Where in this passage do you see God's faithfulness?*
- » *What could God be trying to accomplish in Abraham and Sarah's waiting?*
- » *In what ways are you currently waiting on the Lord, and how can their story increase your trust in God's faithfulness while you wait?*

Sarah had laughed bitterly at the absurdity of God's promise that she would bear a son at such an advanced age. Now she is laughing out of joy and gladness in the Lord's fulfillment of his promise. Isaac, her son of laughter, is here at long last—and he has been worth the wait.

Yet, when Isaac is weaned as a young child, Sarah sees Ishmael, now an adolescent, laughing at him, and she demands that Abraham cast out both Ishmael and Hagar.

- » *Looking at **Galatians 4:28-31**, what insight do we gain regarding concerns Sarah might be having about Ishmael?*
- » *Why might God tell Abraham to follow through on Sarah's demand?*
- » *How do we see God's compassion toward Hagar and Ishmael?*

Abraham has lived his faith and life imperfectly, yet God has not been surprised by his sin or moral failures. **Thankfully, God's faithfulness is never dependent upon man's obedience, but only always on God's own unchanging character.**

## abraham's faith tested

*read:* Genesis 22:1-19

In this passage, **love is mentioned for the first time in Scripture** as God instructs Abraham to take his only son, whom he loves, and sacrifice him as a burnt offering. God tells Abraham to do the unthinkable, yet unlike when he appeared to Abraham promising to make him into a great nation, Abraham does not question God this time.

- » *Isaac is to be the son through whom Abraham's innumerable descendants will come—including the Son who will crush the serpent—why might God ask something so inconceivable and illogical of Abraham?*

Having promised the servants that **they would worship God and they would return**, Abraham and Isaac ascend the mountain together. Abraham is well over 100 years old, and although scholars disagree on Isaac's age, we know he was strong enough to carry his own wood up the mountain and old enough to understand the necessary elements for a sacrifice.

- » *What might be going on in Isaac's mind as he walks with his father?*
- » *What questions might Abraham be asking God as he walks out his obedience?*



# jacob and esau

*read:* Genesis 25:19–28

When Isaac is 40 years old, he marries a woman from his father's family named Rebekah who is also barren. He is now in the same quandary his parents had once faced.

- » *Isaac likely knew the story of his own miraculous birth; how might that impact the fervency of his prayers and his confidence in God's ability to answer them?*
- » *How have other people's stories of God's faithfulness fueled your prayer life and your trust in him?*

After 20 years of marriage, Rebekah is pregnant with not one, but two sons! Her unsettling pregnancy is a foreshadowing of what is to come for these two brothers.

- » *What does the Lord reveal to Rebekah about her sons?*
- » *God chooses to set Jacob over his older brother Esau before the boys are even born (**Romans 9:10–13**). What does this show us about the role of human effort in God's divine purposes?*

## the birthright

*read:* Genesis 25:29–34

Although Esau is the firstborn, each son is wrongly favored by one parent based on their natural interests and personalities. Typically, the firstborn son would be given the birthright; this signified preeminence above any children born after him. **He traditionally received a double portion of the inheritance**, which for Esau would include all God had promised to Abraham through the covenant (**Genesis 17:7–8**).

However, Esau is more concerned with his immediate need than his future inheritance; Jacob is happy to take advantage of his ambivalence and his physical hunger.

- » *Why do you think Esau places so little value on his birthright?*
- » *Esau's price was a bowl of stew. For what earthly desires are you most tempted to disregard your inheritance in Christ?*

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.*

**Ephesians 1:3**

## the blessing

*read:* Genesis 27

While the birthright was a legal and practical means to care for the family after the father's death, **the blessing was more prophetic and spiritual in its significance**.

Although anyone could receive a blessing, culturally the greater blessing was reserved for the firstborn.

After eating his stew, Esau likely gives little thought to what he had done until decades later when the time comes for Isaac to bless his sons who are now in their seventies. In the ancient Near East, **this blessing given by the father** was not a nice but empty gesture—rather it was seen as inspired by God himself.



# joseph

*read: Genesis 37, 39–41*

Over the next 30 years, Jacob fathers 12 sons, by four women, and repeats the sin of his father by choosing a favored son, Joseph. **Favoritism always breeds contempt among siblings.**

Joseph's youthful arrogance in telling his brothers his dreams, combined with their disdain for him, drives them to murderous schemes. First they plan to kill him, but instead decide to sell him to a group of Ishmaelites traveling down to Egypt.

- » *Imagine being Joseph in this dire situation: what aspects of God's character would you be clinging to?*
- » *How do the actions of Jacob's sons against him mirror Jacob's own deceptive tactics with his father, Isaac?*

Even in this hopeless and seemingly impossible situation, **God's word repeatedly tells us, "the Lord was with Joseph" (Genesis 39:2)**. The presence of the Lord in Joseph's life brings increased opportunities and favor for Joseph with his captors. In this very dark place, Joseph consistently honors God by doing the right thing, yet his suffering increases.

- » *How does the life of Joseph challenge your ideas of God's goodness and human suffering?*
- » *How might God use your suffering to demonstrate his love for you?*

Sold into slavery at the age of 17, **Joseph lives the rest of his days in Egypt**, including several years in prison. While in captivity, he interprets the dreams of two fellow prisoners who then forget about him when they are released. However, in the face of hopelessness, **Joseph maintains his confidence in the Lord**—and the Lord never leaves him.

- » *In what ways do we see Joseph's steadfast faith in action despite his circumstances?*
- » *Does knowing God is always with you provide assurance and peace in uncertain times? Why or why not?*

*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*

**Genesis 50:20**

It is another two years before God gives Pharaoh dreams that need interpreting, causing the cupbearer to finally remember Joseph. After 13 years of slavery, at the age of 30, Joseph likely never expects to suddenly be elevated to Pharaoh's second-in-command.

- » *What does Joseph's exhalation show us about God's timing and sovereignty?*

The famine spreads to the entire region, including Canaan where Joseph's family still lives. **All the world must go to Egypt for grain, including Joseph's older brothers.** When they meet Joseph, he knows exactly who they are, but they are unaware of his true identity. Through a series of encounters, Joseph tests their integrity to see if they have changed. Finally, he determines it is time to make himself known to all his brothers.

# reconciliation and redemption

*read: Genesis 45-48*

Despite the unfathomable heartache that Joseph suffered at the hands of his brothers, **he chooses forgiveness and reconciliation** instead of vengeance and retaliation. Now the brothers must return to gather their father and families and bring them down to Egypt.

- » *How is Joseph able to forgive his brothers after all the wrong they have done to him?*
- » *In what ways does he prove he has truly forgiven them?*
- » *What could Jacob be thinking when the brothers tell him that Joseph is alive?*

God redeems: **he will use the most hopeless situations for our good and his glory**—and even to save an entire nation. Joseph steadfastly trusts the God who has been with him throughout his life, and he remains confident that sometime after his death, God will lead the Israelites back to their promised land (**Genesis 50:25**).

- » *How does the story of Joseph's life repeat themes from earlier biblical we have studied?*
- » *In what ways does Joseph foreshadow Christ and the gospel?*
- » *Thinking ahead to the book of Exodus, what is the future significance of Israel's entire family now living in Egypt?*
- » *What has God revealed to you about his multifaceted character and his seamless story as you've spent time in Genesis?*

## seeing Jesus

Hundreds of years after Joseph was taken from his home and brought to slavery in Egypt, the Son of God willingly left his home in glory to be confined to human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ (**John 17:5**). Like Joseph, Jesus remained faithful in the face of temptation (**Hebrews 4:15**), and he, too, was betrayed by his own people, enduring unfathomable suffering at the hands of sinful men (**Mark 15:9-15**).

By the divine will of the triune God, Christ willingly went to the cross and was crucified for our sins—saving his brothers from death (**Acts 2:23-24, Hebrews 2:14-15**). God forgives us in Christ and reconciles us to himself, not for this life only, but for all eternity, and he will be faithful to bring us home to our eternal promised land (**Philippians 3:20-21**).







loving him  
& loving his.