

# GENESIS

We live in a world shattered,

Each step reechoes the cracking of broken glass,  
Shards removed at first from aching feet  
but then . . . finally . . . tolerated,  
Longing to recover the tranquil garden of gentle grass.

Some days you might not feel it, but I bet that often you do. I call it “the longing.” Often, it is felt most on days that are either best or worst. It happens when the world seems almost perfect (like a warm day at the shore with tall waves to ride and lavender sunsets), or when horror surrounds you (like hearing of the death of a friend). You long for the day at the beach to never end. You long for your friend to rise from the casket. You long . . . for it.

Many have explained “the longing” in different ways. My favorite explanation came from the poet Dante Alighieri. He said that winds blew out from the top of the Mountain of Purgatory on the opposite side of the world and made us long for “it.” (Don’t get me wrong there is no mountain in the Pacific like this, but I still like the story.) The Garden of Eden was set at the top of this mountain. These winds carried the scent of the Earthly Paradise out over the world. Each night

this brought back to us memories of a land that only a few humans had ever seen but that all of us somehow yearn for, the land of Eden. This sweet smell made us long to go back into the garden with God, with peace. This is what we long for in the best and worst of times.

Many centuries ago our first father began a sad journey, the journey of his exile. His path leads through the years to you . . . to today. As our father first stepped out of the garden into a world cursed and fighting against him, he knew he had shattered the world.

He carried with him, however, one glimmer of hope. He was promised that someday, Someone, a Seed would come and open the gates of the garden again. He could go back home again then. This is where the longing started.

You stand at the beginning of another journey. Before you is the first book of the Bible, Genesis. In it and the many other books you will be studying are wonders that you can not now imagine. Come along for the journey. Our destination is set. We hope to see our ancestral home once more, but first we have to figure out how we got here.



In this detail from the fresco in the Sistine Chapel, we look back to the dawn of Time and see the creation of the sun and moon.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### Author and Context

Both Jewish and Christian scholars have historically maintained that Moses was the author of Genesis. While this has been questioned by modern scholarship, Mosaic authorship or editorship is quite reasonable. First, Moses was certainly capable of writing the book, educated as he was in all the learning of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22). Second, the text of Genesis is structured around ten sections<sup>1</sup> which begin with the Hebrew word *toledoth*, “These are the generations of . . .” (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2). It is likely that these were written sources which the author edited and compiled into their present form. As a prince in Egypt, Moses would have had access to such written records, whether among the Egyptians or the Israelites. Third, and most significant, both Jesus and the apostles assume that Moses was the author (e.g., Matt. 8:4; Mark 7:10; John 1:17; 7:22; Acts 3:22; Rom. 10:5; etc.). Since Jesus was omniscient, that is He knew everything and the apostles wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit, the conclusion that Moses was the author follows quite naturally.<sup>2</sup>

Abraham welcomes heavenly visitors to a meal.



Growing up in the Egyptian court during the New Kingdom in Ancient Egypt, Moses (c. 1526–1406 B.C.) would have been exposed to one of the most sophisticated, wealthy, and powerful kingdoms the earth had yet seen. Under the tutelage of his adoptive mother, most likely the powerful Hatshepsut, Moses could have become a major player in Egyptian history. However, he considered the “reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt” (Heb. 11:26) and numbered himself with the people of God, leading them out of bondage, revealing to them the precious law of God, and bringing them to the brink of the Promised Land.

### Significance

Genesis is a masterpiece. Using a wide variety of literary genres (writing styles) and techniques, Genesis successfully acquaints the sons of Israel with their fathers and enables them to see both their faithfulness and weakness. As a result, it enables the Israelites to depart from Egypt knowing their role in God’s plan. Despite their own weakness, God would use them to bless the nations if they would but love and serve Him. The same holds true today for us who are the sons of Abraham by faith (Rom. 4:16, 17).

The word *Genesis* means beginnings. Nearly all ideas, events, and themes developed later in the Bible have their beginning in this book. The frequent references to God as Creator (e.g., Ps. 8; 19; Isa. 40:28; Rom. 1:25) drive us back to Genesis. The ubiquitous or ever present nature of sin which prompts the fall of Israel again and again (Deut. 27:9-26; Judg. 2:11-23; 2 Kings 17:7-20; 24:1-5) receives its explanation in the Fall. Our hope for deliverance from corruption bases itself upon the repeated promises in Genesis—the Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent’s head (3:15), the Descendant of Abraham through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed (12:3; 22:18), the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world (22:13,14), and the Ruler who would arise from the tribe of Judah (49:8-12).

The significance of Genesis is not limited to the biblical text. Throughout history, Genesis has shaped the thinking and imagination of millions. Writers have imitated its stories. Scientists have used and abused the creation account. Artists and musicians have sought to capture its passion and emotion. It is hard to overestimate the influence of Genesis.

## Main Characters

The major character who pervades Genesis is the Triune God of heaven and earth, Yahweh. In the beginning He speaks the world into existence, creating all things “very good.” After the Fall, He repeatedly evaluates the works of the sons of men. Eventually He chooses a people for Himself and preserves them from certain destruction despite their foolishness and treachery.

The other characters are divisible according to the two main sections of the book. Chapters I through 11 discuss the early history of the world, known as primeval history. During this period the major figures are Adam and Eve, the first couple, Cain and Abel, the first siblings, and Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the founders of a new humanity following the flood.

The second section of the book, chapters 12 through 50, chronicles the beginning of God’s redemptive (the way He would save a people) program through a single family. The three patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—figure largely in this story. Associated with them are a variety of other fascinating characters. With Abraham, we see his wife Sarah, his nephew Lot, his wife’s maid-servant Hagar, his child Ishmael, and his promised son Isaac. With Isaac we witness his wife Rebekah and his sons Esau and Jacob. With Jacob, renamed Israel, we meet his brother Esau, his uncle Laban, his wives Leah and Rachel, and his twelve children, the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Noteworthy among them are Judah and Joseph who play pivotal roles in the last portion of the book.

## Summary and Setting

Interestingly enough, Genesis has two different historical settings. First, it has the original setting in which the events occurred: the Fertile Crescent and Egypt from creation until the death of Joseph around 1805 B.C., the lion’s share of the material spanning from the call of Abraham in 2091 B.C. (12:4) to the death of Jacob around 1859 B.C. (49:33ff). Second, it has the setting in which it was finally written: Israel was either still in the land of Egypt or had just departed under the leadership of Moses and the time was around 1446 B.C.

The book of Genesis treats its story like a chef peeling an onion. Starting with a broad focus upon the world at large, the book gradually, by removing one layer after another, highlights the selection of the twelve tribes of Israel as God’s chosen people. The book begins with the universe as it bursts upon the scene, new and fresh from its Creator’s hands but soon twisted by man’s rebellion. This rebellion reaps horrendous consequences. Brother is set against brother and in time all men rise up in rebellion against God. Yet in the midst of this rebellion, God works to fulfill His promise to bring forth a Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent (Gen. 3:15). He delivers Noah and his family from judgment and brings them safely through the deluge. God then covenants with Noah, promising never again to destroy the earth in such a fashion but to provide a stable environment in which His Gospel promise would be fulfilled.

As the book progresses, its focus narrows step by step. God’s promised deliverance will not come through Ham and Japheth but through Shem. Yet it will not come through all of Shem’s descendants but only through those of Terah, the father of Abraham. And to Abraham the gospel promise is reissued, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3; cf. Gal. 3:8).

But God has not finished narrowing the scope of his redemptive purpose. Not all of Abraham’s children shall be incorporated into God’s plan—Ishmael is passed over and the story focuses upon Isaac, whose life is redeemed by the ram which God provides in the thicket. Then Esau is left behind and the story of Jacob becomes paramount. Jacob is renamed Israel and his sons, the sons of Israel, become the twelve tribes through whom God’s redemptive purposes for the world will be fulfilled.

The sons of Israel, however, fail to perceive their role in the plan of God. They quarrel and complain and treat their brother Joseph treacherously, selling him into slavery in Egypt. But God’s promises cannot be thwarted. He uses their jealousy and spite to change their character and preserve them in the land of Egypt; they meant it for evil, but God intended it for good (50:20). And so the book ends, awaiting the fulfillment of God’s promise to lead His people to the promised land (50:24, 25; cf. 15:12–16).

## Worldview

J.R.R. Tolkien's superb *The Lord of the Rings* epic never fails to stir my imagination. It has spawned whole industries. Book stores are lined with "Tolkien like" material (much of which deserves as little attention as it receives). Hollywood produced three blockbuster movies based on Tolkien's epic. When these movies came out they caused quite a stir, and many people were so inspired by them that they actually picked up the books and began to read. Or, better yet, perhaps they picked up the books first and read them before they went to see the movies.

But imagine for a moment that you did watch the first movie and were so inspired by what you saw that you picked up *The Fellowship of the Ring* and began to read Tolkien's tale. Let us pretend that you were so excited that you decided to skip the prologue with its extended discourse on the history of hobbits and jump right into Chapter I. You would, of course, immediately bump into Bilbo Baggins. And as you

read, you would find that Bilbo is not your typical hobbit. It seems that Bilbo has had some odd adventures, has actually been out of the Shire and is now fabulously rich as a result. You pause in your reading. "I'd like to know about that adventure," you say to yourself. Suppressing this desire, however, you press on—you want to read about Sauron and Isengard. But the desire continues to increase as tantalizing details from the past leak out—a magic ring, a wizard, frozen trolls, the House of Elrond, and the son of Gloin. You get a nagging feeling that you are missing an important piece of the puzzle. "Will I never have any peace?" you ask yourself. So you decide to glance at the Prologue. And there you find mention of an earlier book, *The Hobbit*, where many of these tantalizing details are discussed. Heaving a great sigh, you decide to become a true Tolkien aficionado. You close *The Fellowship of the Ring* and go to the store where you pick up a copy of *The Hobbit* and you begin to read at the beginning.

The point of this vignette is to illustrate that the first book of a series often sets the stage for the entire set. Frequently it reveals key information without which the other books are cryptic or make no sense. What is the basic story line or plot? Who are the major characters? The heroes? The villains? What problems do the characters face? How will they overcome these problems? The answers to these and other questions are often provided in the first book.

So it is with the Bible. The book of Genesis sets the stage for the entire book—both Old and New Testaments and for all of life. Without an understanding of Genesis the reader of Deuteronomy, the Psalms, or Matthew is going to be at a loss to understand fully what is being discussed. On the contrary, the man or woman who knows Genesis will both understand and enjoy the latter books much more.

To understand this "introduction" to the Bible and to all of life, one must understand the main characters and the main problem that faces these characters.

The reward for this grand epic, however, is unlike reading the *Rings* trilogy or *The Hobbit*. Much more is at stake; much more can be gained because this epic is the story of your race. The great problem set forth in Genesis is your great problem, and to grasp God's answer to this problem at Calvary you must understand Genesis.



Scripture tells of a flaming sword outside of the garden to keep out Adam and Eve.

## God Is Personal

The great main character of this story is the Lord God of heaven and earth, Who is unlike any other being.

One of the interesting aspects of God's personhood is that He interacts with Himself. This indicates that God is Triune—He is three persons in one nature. While the full revelation of the Triune character of God comes in the New Testament, Genesis contains at least two clear allusions to this central biblical doctrine. First, within the first three verses of Chapter 1 we have all three persons of the Trinity mentioned: God, the Spirit of God, and the Word of God. Second, God refers to Himself in the plural, "Let Us make man . . ." (1:26), "Behold the man has become like one of Us . . ." (3:22), "Let Us go down . . ." (11:7). Some have argued that this use of the plural is the "plural of majesty" as when a queen says, "We would like crumpets with our tea." Others have argued that this is a reference to other heavenly beings such as angels. However, in the light of later revelation it seems that the most reasonable explanation is that this is a foreshadowing of the Triune character of God.

Genesis not only reveals the Triune nature of God, it also assumes that there is only one true God. In the context of Egyptian culture and belief, the opening chapter of Genesis is revolutionary. The Egyptians associated the various portions of creation with a multitude of different deities who each had their respective sphere(s) of authority. Genesis overthrows this entire way of

## CREATION MYTHS

Many in academia refer to Genesis as a creation myth. While the Bible is not "mythological," there are creation myths from vastly diverse cultures and civilizations.

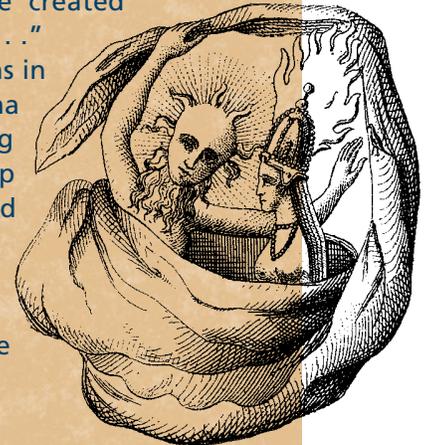
The Sumerians held that the primeval sea existed first and within that the heaven and the earth were formed. The stars, planets, sun and moon were formed between heaven and earth. The Babylonian story is similar: "When in the height heaven was not named, and the earth beneath did not yet bear a name, and the primeval Apsu, who begat them, and chaos, Tiamut, the mother of them both their waters were mingled together, and no field was formed, no marsh was to be seen; when of the gods none had been called into being, and none bore a name, and no destinies were ordained; then were created the gods in the midst of heaven . . ."

There are several creation myths in Hinduism. One myth tells of Brahma sitting in a lotus flower, floating and tossing on the sea. He lifted up his arms and calmed the wind and the ocean. Then he split the lotus flower into three. He stretched one part into the heavens, another part into the earth, and with the third part he created the skies.

In ancient Egypt several versions of creation emerged. In one there was the swirling watery chaos from which arose

Atum, the primordial god represented in the form of a human and a serpent. He created the gods, then men were created from his tears. In another myth, the god Ptah is the supreme deity and creator of Atum: "He who made all and created the gods . . . who gave birth to the gods, and from whom every thing came forth, foods, provisions, divine offerings, all good things."

There have been many reports from missionaries in the last century that pre-literate tribes often have "sacred narratives" which are quite similar to, and provide a kind of echo for, the truth of Biblical creation.



In Hinduism, Brahma is the supreme god whose essence pervades the entire universe.

thinking by tracing the origin of everything to the creative power of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The gods of Egypt, Moses declares in Genesis 1, are mere idols (cf. Ps. 115:1-8).

### *God is Sovereign*

Like all good epics, the history of the world has a producer and director.

As the Creator of all, the God of Genesis is also the Lord of all, or Sovereign. This means, first, that God is distinctly different from His creation. While God has existed from eternity, the world began to exist when God called it into being. God created the world *ex nihilo*, out of nothing (cf. Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:3). While God is not dependent on anything for His own existence, all of creation depends on Him.

God's sovereignty extends over all the earth. The God of Scripture is immanently involved in His creation, not passively and distantly watching all that transpires. The creation is His and He does with it as He sees fit. He destroys the earth with a flood, He confuses the tongues at Babel, He destroys Sodom and Gomorrah, He turns Lot's wife into a pillar of salt, He chooses Jacob rather than Esau. The list could go on, but the point is the same: God acts in the world as He sees fit.

God's sovereignty would be frightening if it were not simultaneously revealed that God is holy, righteous, and good. His sovereignty is the power to do all those things which He wants to do. Of course, all that He wants to do is good and right because He is Goodness and Righteousness. When Abraham was informed of the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he feared for the lives of the righteous within the city and asked, "Shall not the Judge of all

So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

the earth deal justly?" The ensuing conversation between God and Abraham reveals that God does indeed deal justly and mercifully with sinners.

God's goodness, however does not make Him too lax and indulgent to visit calamity on his enemies. Cain is cast out for murder, the earth is flooded because of man's wickedness, languages are confused because of pride, Sodom and Gomorrah

are incinerated for their debauchery, and two of Judah's sons are killed for their "evil."

While God condemns ungodliness, He promises to bless those who love Him and keep His commandments. God's treatment of those who serve Him is in sharp contrast to pagan deities who may or may not be favorably disposed to those who seek their aid. The gods are foremost man's enemies. In contrast, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob always works for the good of those who love Him and keep His commandments. He never punishes the godly for following in His paths. Thus, He takes Enoch to himself, He preserves the life of Noah, He rewards the faithfulness of Abraham, and He blesses the integrity of Joseph.

### *God is Covenantal*

This God who is unique and sovereign is also love.

The reason God works for the good of His people is because He loves them. This love is demonstrated by the fellowship God has with His people. First, He communicates with them. He does not leave them ignorant of Himself and His standards; He reveals Himself via direct revelation, blessings, dreams, prophecies, angelic visitations. Second, He establishes a clearly defined relationship (or covenant) with them, promising to bless them if they will but love and serve Him but threatening to chastise and even destroy them should they rebel. We see this in His relationship with Adam (2:15-17), in His covenant with Noah and his offspring (9:8-17), and in His covenant with Abraham and his descendants (17:1-14).

In His covenant with Adam<sup>3</sup> God gives clearly defined privileges, expectations, and consequences. He grants that Adam and Eve can eat from any tree in the garden, presumably even from the tree of life. However, God restricts them from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warns them that if they eat of its fruit, they "will surely die." Adam and Eve despise the Word of the Lord and listen to the word of the serpent. As a result, God demonstrates His faithfulness—He fulfills His word of judgment, and mankind becomes subject to death and decay.

After the Fall, God sets in motion a plan to save His ruined creation. His plan, much like Tolkien's *Hobbit*, involves some strange choices. We might expect God to immediately wipe out the wicked

or raise up some army of the righteous. God often, however, chooses the few and the obscure, just as Tolkien calls on the frightened and apprehensive Bilbo to do great things and to set in motion the actions far beyond his imagination. So God looks at times to single families like Noah and his children. God calls Abraham to be the father of many nations. Ironically, when God first comes to Abraham he is an idol worshipper who has been unable to have any children. What irony!

God's covenant with Noah likewise stresses God's faithfulness. While we are accustomed to think of the regularity of the seasons as a matter of scientific necessity, Genesis presents this regularity as a testimony of God's faithfulness. Why does the sun rise each morning? Why does winter turn to spring? Why do birds fly? Apples fall from trees? Why do cows moo? The answer, according to Genesis, is because God is faithful—He orchestrates both the mundane and the spectacular events in the world (cf. Ps. 104; Col. 1:17).

God's covenant with Abraham shines brighter than the sun. Again and again God manifests His determination to fulfill His promises in the life of Abraham and His descendants. Nowhere is this portrayed more forcefully than in Genesis 15. It was a common practice in the Ancient Near East to establish covenants by slaying an animal, cutting the animal in two and then placing the two pieces opposite one another. The participants of the covenant would then walk through the pieces as they recited the terms of the covenant. The action symbolized the covenanters' vow either to fulfill the terms of the covenant or to become like the divided animal—dead. The remarkable part of Genesis 15 is that, though there are two parties to the covenant, God and Abraham, only one of them walks

through the pieces. God, symbolized by the flaming pot, passes through the pieces and thus declares to Abraham—either I will fulfill my promise to grant you a son or I will die. The latter of course is impossible. What follows? God will certainly grant a son. What a testimony of God's faithfulness!<sup>4</sup>

This testimony continues throughout Genesis as God fulfills His promises despite the foibles, trickery, and treachery of men. He blesses the faithful efforts of His people and makes them successful. Likewise, God turns the evil actions of His own people to *their* eventual good. While not excusing sin, Genesis emphasizes that God is faithful and does whatever is necessary to fulfill His promises.



Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

### *God is Merciful*

As in Tolkien's epic where the weaknesses of even a Hobbit like Bilbo is eventually unmasked, the biblical characters prove that they are sinners in need of grace. During his adventure, as you might remember, Bilbo finds a "precious" magic ring. Eventually, he begins to fall under its powers, and we see his weakness. In the same manner, the biblical heroes all have feet of clay. Noah falls into drunkenness. Sarah laughs at God's promise of an heir. Abraham seeks to fulfill God's promise in his own strength by fathering Ishmael. Isaac tries to bless Esau instead of Jacob. The patriarchs even sell their brother, Joseph, into slavery. All are in need of mercy.

Genesis emphasizes the mercy of God alongside His covenantal faithfulness. Though Adam and Eve rebel against Him, He does not completely disown them but promises to deliver them from the craft of the serpent (3:15), provides them with clothing to cover their shame and symbolize their forgiveness (3:21), and expels them from the garden lest they live forever in their fallen state (3:22-24). Though God destroys the world in a great deluge, He "remembers" (8:1) Noah and delivers Him. Though Sarai is brought into the harem of Pharaoh, God delivers her and preserves her to bear the promised child (12:10-20). The God of Genesis is a God who delights to show mercy.

### *Man Reflects the Image of God*

The other main character in Genesis is mankind. Man begins his time on earth as a true and righteous reflector of God's glory. Man is like a mirror reflecting back to God the wonder of His own glorious love.

Originally, man was made in the image of God. What is he as the image of God? First, he is personal. Just as God speaks, acts and judges, so man speaks, acts and judges. He has the capacity to think and reason. He can analyze and assess.

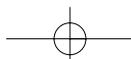
Second, like God, man is initially sovereign, but in a limited way. He is sovereign, first, in the sense that he is a mini-creator. Many creatures are like God in this way. Beavers make dams; birds make nests; bumble bees make honey. But man has the unique ability to create, not simply things that he needs, but frivolous things—things which have no apparent link to his needs—bookshelves, video games, sculptures, and Oreos. The reason man can and should create such things is because God did. God did not need the universe; He created it because He wanted to. It delighted Him. And just as there is a fundamental distinction between God and the universe, there is also a distinction between the things man makes and man himself.<sup>5</sup>

Man is also sovereign because God has invested man with authority over the creatures of the earth.

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea . . . .' And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea . . . .' (1:26, 28).

Like God, man is covenantal. God created man to live not in isolation from but in relation to God and other creatures. Man always lives *coram Deo*, before the face of God. God walks in the garden and finds Adam when he is trying to cover his sin (3:8-11). God "comes down" to see what the men of a particular region are

Isaac is shown mercy and a ram is given for the sacrifice to God.



doing (11:7; 18:21). All men are in a covenantal relationship with God. Some men acknowledge this relationship, and others choose to suppress it (e.g., 19:9 cf. Rom. 1:18–32), but everyone is accountable to God. Man also lives in relationship with other people. In the opening chapters of Genesis, the covenant of marriage is created by God as a perpetual statute (2:24). Sons are identified in relation to their fathers and nations in relation to their father, or patriarch (10:1ff). Man is responsible to see that justice is upheld and to hold perpetrators of injustice, notably murder, accountable (9:6). Man always exists in covenantal relation with other people—in the family, the church, and the state. Third, Adam himself bore a special covenantal relationship to the entire creation. Adam was appointed by God as the head of creation. When Adam sinned against the Lord, the earth was plunged into ruin and decay and all of Adam's descendants were born in a state of moral corruption. In other words, man is born into sin and born a sinner.

### *Man is a Distorted Reflection*

Early in the story of Genesis, however, Adam, the righteous mirror reflecting God's glory, is shattered by sin. As a sinner man no longer perfectly bears the image of God, but he still bears God's image.

This fall into sin creates the great problem for the human race. Adam was created "very good." Sin, however, made man love evil and commit sin. For now, because he is created in the image of God, there are certain things which man is but other things he ought to be but is not.

Man ought to be holy, righteous, and good. God created man to joyfully receive His commands and obey them. He told Adam and Eve to abstain from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When they disobeyed, He visited them with death and cast them out of the garden. He demanded that they

obey. This expectation of obedience recurs again and again in Genesis. When God looked down upon the earth prior to the Flood, He "saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and . . . the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was

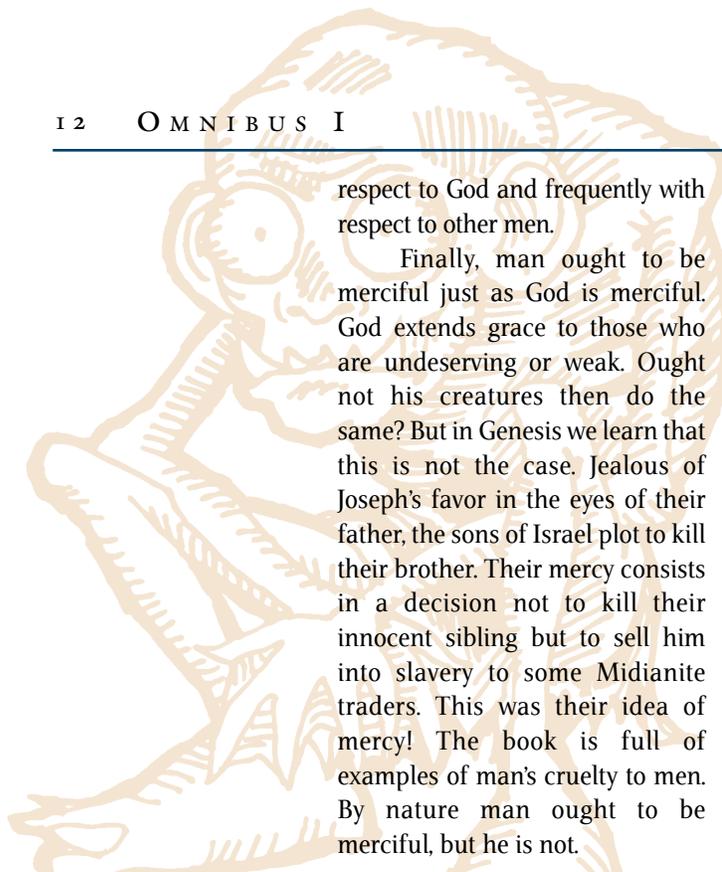
grieved in His heart" (6:5,6). As a result, He judges man for his disobedience with the great deluge. God expected that His law would be obeyed. However, as a result of the Fall, man no longer had the capacity to do good on his own initiative. Following the Flood, God declares that "the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth" (8:21). By nature man ought to be



"Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made."

holy, righteous and good, but he is not.

Also man ought to be faithful both to God and to other men. Just as God is faithful to fulfill his covenantal obligations and promises, man ought to fulfill his. Sadly, this does not happen. Beginning in the opening chapters of Genesis, man turns against his sovereign Lord. Although God created man to live in fellowship with Him, man rejected this relationship. As a result, man's covenantal faithfulness to other men is also undermined. Isaac endeavors to avoid the Word of the Lord and give the blessing to Esau, forcing Rebekah and Jacob to resort to trickery in order to fulfill God's prophecy. Laban treacherously betrays Jacob, forcing him to work for seven years and then failing to give Rachel in fulfillment of his promise. By nature, therefore, man is a covenant breaker, always with



respect to God and frequently with respect to other men.

Finally, man ought to be merciful just as God is merciful. God extends grace to those who are undeserving or weak. Ought not his creatures then do the same? But in Genesis we learn that this is not the case. Jealous of Joseph's favor in the eyes of their father, the sons of Israel plot to kill their brother. Their mercy consists in a decision not to kill their innocent sibling but to sell him into slavery to some Midianite traders. This was their idea of mercy! The book is full of examples of man's cruelty to men. By nature man ought to be merciful, but he is not.

Sméagol—  
or Gollum—  
from Tolkien's  
epic *The Lord  
of the Rings*

*Man is a Restored  
Image-Bearer*

The problem of sin must be solved and the shattered mirror of man must be restored. Fortunately,

Genesis does not leave us with what man ought to be by nature but is not. It leads us on to what man can be by grace. This basic distinction is set up in the garden, when God establishes a dichotomy between the seed of the serpent and the Seed of the woman. The seed of the serpent are those who build up the kingdom of Satan and rebellious man. The Seed of the woman is ultimately Christ and also, in Him, those who build up the kingdom of God and redeemed man. This redemption follows a basic pattern. First, God extends his grace to a man. Second, He speaks a word to him, expecting that he will receive His word and believe it. Third, the man responds by approaching him via

blood sacrifice as an acknowledgement of his sin (this pattern can be seen as early as Genesis 4 with Abel). Finally, the faithful man demonstrates his faith and gratitude by living in obedience to God's law.

This pattern is evident throughout Genesis: See *Chart 1*.

Genesis sets the stage for the greatest epic, the real history of the world in which God redeems Adam's fallen race through Christ. God's story sets the stage for all future history. It also sets the pattern for all great stories throughout history. As we recall Tolkien's *Hobbit*, we see that he echoes Genesis in many ways. The insignificant, like Bilbo of Bag End, are called to become great players in the history of their imaginary world. This, of course, repeats the pattern of the patriarchs, who are called to important roles in the history of God's saving plan.

*The Hobbit* also leaves us with the same sense as Genesis. Both end leaving us in a state of hope and expectation mixed with foreboding. What will become of the Ring? What will happen to Bilbo? We haven't seen the last of Gollum, have we? Now, we are ready to dive into the *Fellowship* with new understanding. In a similar way, Genesis leaves us with the expectation that God will bring about great things through the family of Abraham. We hope that we will again enter the garden. We long for the Seed of the woman to appear. This expectation, however, is mixed with foreboding of coming slavery and the fact that the problems of the Fall have still left the world in pieces as we leave the book. God's original creative act has been distorted and corrupted, but God Himself has not been thwarted.

—Stuart W. Bryan

**For Further Reading**

Spielvogel, Jackson. *Western Civilization*. Fifth Edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003. 1-33.

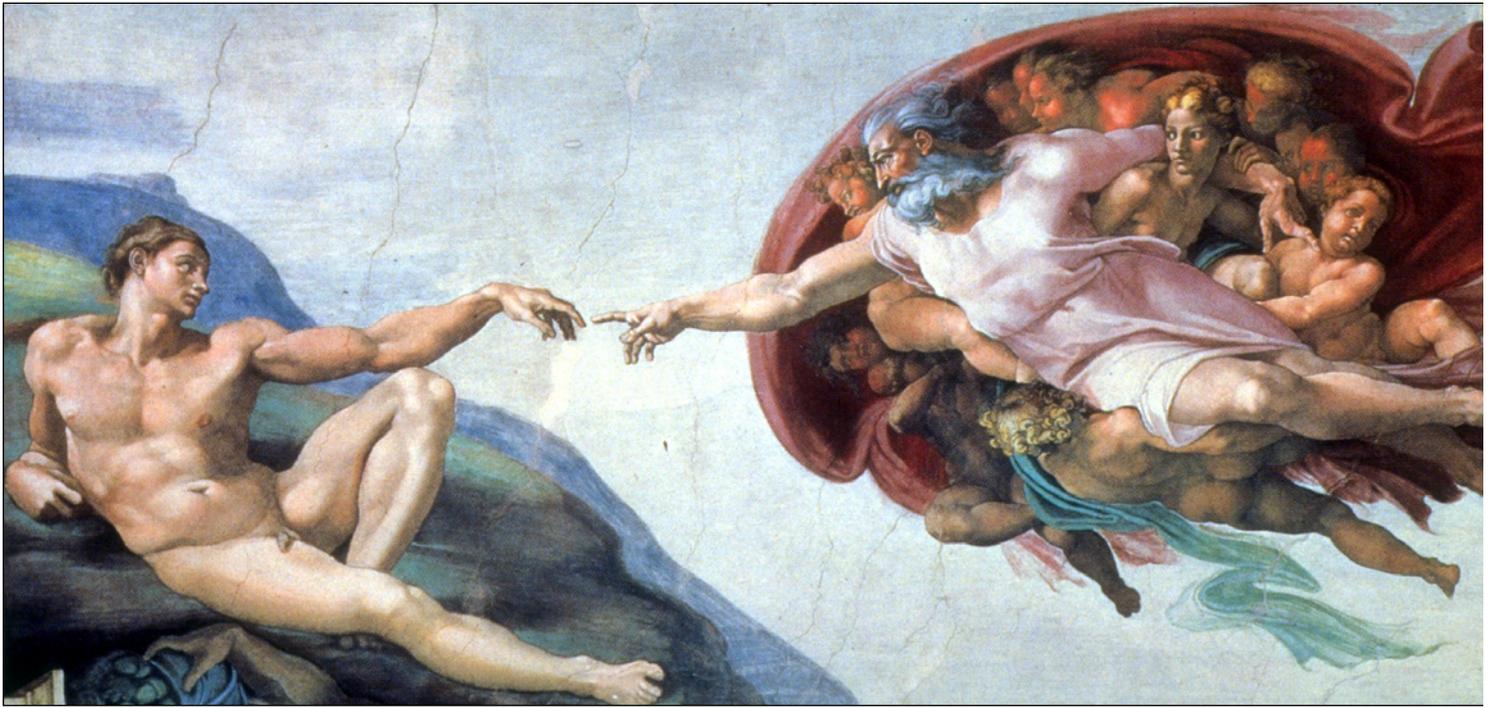
*Veritas Press Bible Cards: Genesis through Joshua*. Lancaster, PA: Veritas Press. Creation (1), The Fall in the Garden (2), The Flood (5), God's Covenant with Abraham (9), Twelve Tribes of Israel (17).

Jordan, James. *Primeval Saints*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001.

Leithart, Peter J. *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2000. Pages 17-70.

Chart 1: **PATTERNS OF OBEDIENCE**

	NOAH	ABRAHAM	JACOB
God's Man	6:8	12:1	25:23
God's word to the man	6:13	12:1-3	28:13-15
Man's sacrifice for sin	8:20-22	12:7, 13:4	33:20
Man's obedience	6:22	15:6	35:2



## SESSION I: PRELUDE

### The Mystery of Michelangelo's *Creation of Man*

This is the famous fresco painting by Michelangelo that is on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. It shows the creation of man spoken of in Genesis. This, of course, shows a very unbiblical picture of God. He is not a grey haired old man. The cherubim are not pudgy little babies. This, however, is not the controversial part. Look behind God. One character is not like the others. Just under God's left arm is a beautiful woman (who is not like the cherubs). Artists and art historians dispute her identity.

*Write a paragraph explaining who she is (Hint: on another part of the ceiling Eve is pictured but she does not look like this woman).<sup>6</sup>*

Detail of Eve from *The Temptation and Expulsion*.



*Some of the answers are as follows:*

**MARY:** This is a popular choice for many. Romaine takes this position. Since the Early Middle Ages, Mary was given the title Mother of God. This title was originally given to clarify the fact that Jesus Christ was really God. By the time the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel was being painted, Mary was being venerated. Still, why is Mary watching Adam? She is not part of the God-head. She did not pre-exist her own birth.

**SOME FEMININE ASPECT OF GOD:** Some feminist theologians might be tempted to answer in this manner, but it is really out of step with the theology of that day. If this was a female deity (or aspect of God) why wouldn't she be older (a wise, gray-haired woman)?

**EVE:** Even though the Eve in the other part of the painting looks different, some think that this is still the best choice and some think that that they really do not look that different. It would seem, however, that the woman under God's arm looks fragile and feminine, whereas Eve looks more burly. Also, when Adam is created, Eve has not yet

been created. What is she doing behind God when she does not yet exist? Compare our mystery lady with the very muscular Eve shown in the detail below the fresco.

**SOPHIA (Wisdom):** This does not mean a feminine aspect of God. Wisdom in Proverbs is pictured as a woman. It would seem appropriate to have wisdom pictured during the creation of man. It seems this is the most likely answer.

*Discuss or list short answers to the following questions:*

### *Comprehension Questions*

1. When and by whom was Genesis written?

Genesis was written by Moses just prior to or shortly following the Exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt in 1446 B.C.

2. What does the word *Genesis* mean?

The word *Genesis* means “beginnings” and appropriately describes the overall theme of the book of Genesis.

3. How would one divide Genesis into a two part outline?

Genesis can be roughly divided into the following two part outline:

1-11 Primeval History (Early History of the World)

12-50 History of the Patriarchs of Israel

4. What purpose does the word *toledoth* serve in Genesis? What does it mean?

The word *toledoth* is a Hebrew word meaning, “These are the generations of . . .” It indicates that Moses used previous written documents in compiling Genesis and serves as an organizational tool for the book itself. There are ten *toledoth* sections.

5. Make a list of the things we learn about God from the book of Genesis.

According to Genesis there is only one living and true God who is (1) personal, (2) Triune, (3) sovereign, (4) transcendent, (5) authoritative (immanent), (6) holy, righteous, and good, (7) covenantal, (8) faithful, and (9) merciful. This list is by no means exhaustive.

6. Why did the Fall introduce a distinction between what man is as the image of God and what man ought to be?

While the image of God remains after the Fall, the Fall did introduce an anomaly into man’s position. Adam was created “very good.” He was free in the fullest sense of that word since he had no predisposition to choose evil. While not as fully developed as he would one day potentially be—even Adam was to grow in righteousness, to advance from a position of goodness to one of greater goodness—he was pure. The Fall altered this and created a tragic dilemma for man in the image of God. For now, because he is created in the image of God, there are certain things which man is but other things he ought to be but is not.

7. What is a covenant? With whom did God enter into covenants in Genesis?

A covenant is a solemnly established and clearly defined relationship between two or more persons. When God enters into covenant with people, He promises to bless them if they will but love and serve Him, but threatens to chastise and even destroy them should they rebel. We see this in His relationship with Adam (2:15–17), in His covenant with Noah and his offspring (9:8–17), and in His covenant with Abraham and his descendants (17:1–14).



### READING FOR SESSION II:

Genesis 1:1–11:26 (*This reading is the Toledoth 1–5 mentioned in the Author and Context section.*)

## SESSION II: DEBATE

Genesis 1:1–11:26

### A Question to Argue

How long did it take for God to create the world?

Use this question as a discussion-starter. Teachers should look for opportunities to introduce other questions as the students’ answers open doors to deeper, probing questions.

*Read the three views of Creation held by Christians in the church today outlined below. Then discuss or write short responses to the objections to each view, thinking through how*

advocates of each view would seek to defend their position.

### THE HISTORIC SEVEN 24-HOUR DAYS POSITION.

This view takes Genesis literally. It states that God created the world in six days. Each day was a 24-hour period. It holds that this creation happened in the order set forth in Scripture and that God rested the Seventh Day. This view also holds that all death was the result of the Fall. This pattern of work and rest set up the weekly paradigm that we are all to follow.

### THE DAY AGE POSITION.

This position asserts that the “days” in Genesis are not 24-hour days, but that each Day represents an age that could have been years or even millennia long. It bases its interpretation of the Hebrew word *yom* (day) on verses like Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8. It looks at the Sabbath rest of God on the Seventh day as His rest from His creative activity which continues to this day. This view does believe that animal death occurred before the Fall.

### THE FRAMEWORK POSITION.

This view believes that the seven days of creation are not to be taken as literal, twenty-four hour days, but are instead figurative, topical descriptions of God’s creation of the world. As evidence they point to the fact that there is a pattern in Genesis I in which God creates realms in days 1–3 (light and dark in the heavens, the sky and sea, and dry land) and their rulers in days 4–6 (sun and moon to “rule” the day and night, birds and fish to rule the sky and sea, animals and finally man to rule the dry land). This view asserts that the Genesis language offers snapshots of the divine creativity, but that this language is by nature metaphorical. The chief thing not to be taken literally according to the framework position is the chronological sequence. This view does not, however, commit to any specific time frame for creation; neither does it commit itself to any specific order of events. It also allows for the possibility of death in all but man (who bears God’s image) before the Fall and points to the Sabbath as God’s eternal enthronement over creation, and the eternal rest to which all creation ultimately points and is fulfilled in Christ.

## Objections

### OBJECTIONS TO THE SEVEN 24-HOUR DAYS POSITION:

1. How can you know that days 1–3 are “normal 24-hour days” if the sun and moon had not yet been created?

While it is true that the sun and moon were not created on these days, the God who is going to create the sun and the moon is telling us the story. He uses the term that would be most easily understood to be a 24-hour period, and He would know because He was there.

2. How can you hold this view since modern science has found that the earth is about 4 billion years old?

Modern science is fallible. When it comes to comparing the authority of modern science to that of the most clear and consistent reading of Genesis, one should read the text and let the chips fall where they may. Modern science has a prejudice against the supernatural, so it will consistently conflict with Scripture. Trying to make my reading of the Bible fit modern science’s conclusion gives too much authority to fallible men and demonstrates too little faith in the Word of God. As science moves out of its present anti-Christian bias, it should be that its adherents will increasingly see that the natural world should be interpreted in light of Scripture and not vice-versa.

### OBJECTIONS TO THE DAY-AGE POSITION:

1. In the few Old Testament passages in which the words *day* or *days* are not to be taken literally (normal 24-hour days), doesn’t the context determine this meaning?

We should know this because of textual evidence and the findings of science. First, the sun and the moon were not even created until day four. What is a day without the sun? Also, those who hold to the Seven 24-Hour Day Position set science and the Scriptures at odds unnecessarily. The word day can mean a longer period of time. As we look at the world around us, it seems through carbon dating that the world is

older, so why not learn from science how God created the world?

2. Isn't your view just an attempt to force the conclusions of modern science into the biblical text?

Well, it does eliminate a lot of unnecessary conflict between the two, but it is not an attempt to squeeze evolution into the Scriptures. God tells us the story of creation making sure that we know that He created everything and that the material world that He made was good. He is not giving us a science text that lets us in on the details. He has given us the ability to look at things and learn how He made the world. It seems as if He made it over a long period of time (according to science) and the text allows for that reading.

#### OBJECTIONS TO THE FRAMEWORK POSITION:

1. It can be said that the language of Genesis 1 points to a poetic structure (i.e., Realms on Days 1–3 and Rulers on Days 4–6). While this seems clear, why does this pattern prove that the language is figurative? Or, put another way, why couldn't God have done his creative work in a poetic pattern?

He certainly could have done the work in this poetic chronology, but that does not seem to be what the text is trying to make us see. When days 1–3 are said to have "evening and morning" without sun or moon, it should be clear that these are not "normal" days. When we realize this, the next question that we should ask is what is God trying to communicate with this figurative and metaphorical language? It seems that He is giving us clear snapshots of what creation was like, but not tying it to a specific time frame. These snapshots do, however,

set the pattern of work and rest that He wishes us to follow.

2. Do you think that this complicated theory is really what God was trying to convey with the language of Genesis 1 or is this just another attempt to make our Bibles fit the conclusions of modern science?

Many times the Scriptures say more than is realized by those that hear it or even by those that wrote it down. The prophecies about Christ were read in the synagogues every week, but few believers were ready for His appearance. Many doctrines have developed by the Church looking back at the text and dealing with controversies that have flared up in a particular time. In our day with the rise of evolutionary theory, Christians have had to think more about the doctrine of creation. While some people's positions are clarified by the writings of theologians like Meredith Kline, there are examples of people in the ancient church who believed that the language of Genesis is metaphorical. The Framework Position neither affirms or denies any particular time frame.

*Write a paragraph promoting which view of creation you think is correct.*

It seems that it is only fair to let you know where this writer stands. I am an advocate of the Seven 24-Hour Days Position because I think that this is the most consistent reading of the Scripture and because inspired writers interpreted it that way (see. Ex. 20:11, 31:17). I fear that some of my brethren who hold to the other positions (Day Age and Framework) have let the ever changing winds of science effect their reading of the text. I do, however, recognize that some really believe that the Bible is teaching these other views. I pray that God brings us all to



more of one mind on this issue.

As you consider the doctrinal positions of your school and the families in the class, make sure that you point children to their pastors and parents for more guidance. My concern in the essay is that they would defend their position well and show charity toward their Christian brothers and sisters while arguing strongly and courageously.



READING FOR SESSION III:  
Genesis 11:27–37:1 (*Toledoth 6–9*)

## SESSION III: DISCUSSION

Genesis 11:27–37:1

### A Question to Consider

Should someone ever be punished or rewarded for the actions of another?

Use this question as a discussion-starter. Teachers should look for opportunities to introduce other questions as the students' answers open doors to deeper, probing questions.

*Discuss or list short answers to the following questions:*

#### *Text Analysis*

1. What one prohibition did God give to Adam in Genesis 2?

God told Adam in Genesis 2:17 that if Adam ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that he would surely die.

2. Why did Eve disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit?

Sadly, Eve was deceived by the serpent who

told her that she would be like God if she ate the fruit.

3. Why did Adam eat? (See I Timothy 2:14 if you need some clarification)

We do not know Adam's positive motive, but we do know that he was not deceived. Adam sinned knowingly.

4. What punishments resulted from Adam's sin?

Eve was cursed by having great pain in child birth and by desiring to usurp the role of her husband. The ground was cursed because of Adam. Adam also was cursed with having to fight against nature instead of it cooperating with him. He also was cursed with death, which was visited on him and on all of the people that he represented (i.e., the entire human race).

5. What curse does the ground receive because of Adam?

The ground is cursed so that it produces thorns and thistles. In the Garden, nature cooperated with and provided for man. After Adam's sin, nature was set at odds with man, so that it is not cooperating with him. Paul says that the creation groans under this curse.

6. What curse do Adam and Eve receive because of Adam's sin?

They are punished with a painful and futile life and ultimately with death.

7. How do we know that this curse is carried on to their children?

The rest of biblical history (and our own observation of the obituary pages, as well) tells us this. The first striking evidence is the first murder, recorded in Genesis 4.

#### *Cultural Analysis*

1. In athletic events, if one player does something wrong (e.g., drops an easy fly ball in the bottom of



the ninth inning, allowing two runs to score and his team to lose), is it fair for his whole team to be punished for it (i.e., lose the game)?

Our culture has little objection to this (except for Red Sox, Cubs and Phillies fans). We understand that team play demands that the players be treated as a united or covenantal unit, where one player's actions are reckoned to the entire group. The players chose to be on the team, so our culture thinks that it is fair.

2. If a child robbed a store, what would our culture say about sending the parents of that thieving child to jail?

Our culture would not like laws like this one because they do not like reckoning a family as a unit, but as a group of individuals who bear little responsibility for each other. I think that a lot of our objections are based on the fact that we do not get to choose our family members.

3. Why does our culture react differently in these circumstance? Is this biblical?

Our culture seems content with covenantal thinking so long as it is reckoned only in places where we make a conscious informed decision about being part of the covenant. God, however, reckons this covenant unity both in situations where a conscious commitment has been made (e.g., marriage covenants) and where one has not been made (e.g., families, nations and as a race in Adam).

### *Biblical Analysis*

*Read Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15:20–22 thoughtfully out loud. These passages can be difficult to understand so make sure you have your Bibles open while you discuss it.*

The teacher should have the answers readily available so he can help students through the answers. In a homeschool setting, make sure that you have the answers available and do not spend too much time on any one question.

1. In both of these passages to what is Adam's sin compared?

This is the most important point to see.

Adam's sin is compared with the salvation that Christ won for His people by dying for them. Christ represented His people in the same manner as Adam represented the entire race. The Bible says little about Adam's relationship to us, but we can learn about this relationship by understanding that it is like the relationship between Christ and His people. Jesus died for His Church on the cross and won salvation for them. His work was credited to us. None of His people hung on the cross and paid for their sins, only Jesus did this, but His payment covered the sins (or atoned for the sins) of all of His people. In the same way, Adam's one sin covered or was credited to all of those whom he represented. As Christians will receive the eternal reward that Christ won for us, so all who are sons and daughters of Adam deserve (and unless God saves them) will receive the punishment that this sin deserves (i.e., all the pains of this life, death itself and the pains of Hell forever). We, however, do not stop with Adam's sin, but we continue to sin because we live in rebellion and crave evil.

2. In Romans 5:12, why did death spread to all men? It spread because all of us sinned in Adam. He sinned and earned cursing as our representative for all of us.

3. In Romans 5:13–14 how were the sins of those that lived between Adam and Moses different than (not in the likeness of) Adam's sin?

Adam sinned by breaking the law of God (Gen. 2:17). After Moses received the tablets, men sinned by breaking the law spoken by God and written on tablets. The men between Adam and Moses did not have this verbal law to disobey. They did not sin in the "likeness" of Adam. They did, however, sin by breaking the law written on their consciences (see Romans 2:15).

4. What does Romans 5:18–19 make clear about Adam's sin?

Adam's sin brought us condemnation, and we became sinners when he sinned.

5. In 1 Corinthians 15:22, what happen to all men in Adam?

As a result of his sin, we died.

**SUMMA**

Write an essay or discuss this question, integrating what you have learned from the questions above.

Is it righteous to punish or reward some people for the actions of another? What does culture believe and what does Scripture teach?

Not only is it righteous, but it is the only way of salvation. In Adam our entire race fell into sin. Each one of us, however, has added immensely to the punishment that we deserve through our own sinful actions. God in mercy visited the punishment so justly deserved by His people upon His Son. Christ absorbed this wrath, and we receive the reward of eternal life. This is just, but justice is not even the beginning of it.



**READING FOR SESSION IV:**  
Genesis 37:2–50:26 (*Toledoth 10*)

**SESSION IV: ANALYSIS**

Genesis 37:2–50:26

**A Question to Consider**

What is a covenant?

Use this question as a discussion-starter. Teachers should look for opportunities to introduce other questions as the students' answers open doors to deeper, probing questions.

Discuss or list short answers to the following questions:

*Text Analysis*

Reread: Genesis 9:1–17 and Genesis 15

1. According to the similarities of these passages, what is a covenant?

We see in these cases that a covenant is an agreement between at least two parties. One party makes a promise or promises, usually gives instruction or law, speaks of the blessing of obedience to this law, and demonstrates their earnest by giving a sign of the covenant.

2. One theologian has said that God's covenant is

basically a relationship (or bond) of life or death significance ruled over by God.<sup>7</sup> What do you see in these two passages that supports this view?

God's covenant in Genesis 9 is concerned with His promise to never cut off all life with a flood. The covenant in Genesis 15 is concerned with Abraham's heir and inheritance.

*Biblical Analysis*

What are the essential parts of a covenant?

Answer the questions in Chart 3.

**SESSION V: DISCUSSION****A Question to Consider**

Can God accomplish His will by using sinful people in the process?

Use this question as a discussion-starter. Teachers should look for opportunities to introduce other questions as the students' answers open doors to deeper, probing questions.

Discuss or list short answers to the following questions:

*Text Analysis*

1. Does God ordain that sinful actions take place? Consider Genesis 45:4–8; 50:19, 20; Exodus 4:21; Matthew 26:54; Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 4:28.

Joseph very plainly ascribes his descent into Egypt to two causes: God and his brothers. God sent Joseph into Egypt through the wickedness of his brothers. In so doing, however, God desired something that was good. He used the sinful actions of the brothers to accomplish His inscrutable purpose. The other passages reinforce this theme. God tells Moses to speak to Pharaoh but also announces that He Himself will harden Pharaoh's heart and cause him to refuse to heed God's word (Ex. 4:21). Jesus notes in Matthew that his murder was decreed ahead of time by God through the Scriptures. The passages in Luke and Acts make this even more explicit.

2. Does this remove man's responsibility for his sin?

Consider the above passages, Ecclesiastes 7:29 and Romans 9:19–26.

God's sovereign decree does not remove man's responsibility. Joseph, remember, ascribes his descent into Egypt both to God and to his brothers. As far as his brothers are concerned, their action was evil. It is true that God overruled their evil intention in His sovereign mercy, but the text continues to hold them accountable for their evil. They themselves acknowledged that the calamities which were coming upon them were a result of their sin (42:21–22).

God made man upright but he sought out many devices. When God created man, he was very good. Man's decision to rebel was his own responsibility. Did this catch God by surprise? Had God intended something else in his secret, decretive will? No. Did these things violate God's revealed law? Yes. It is

helpful in this connection to distinguish between God's decretive and prescriptive wills. His decretive will is His secret and sovereign council whereby He has determined infallibly whatsoever comes to pass. His prescriptive will consists of the commands and laws He has entrusted to man expressing that which is good and right in His sight. God's prescriptive will is the standard for our obedience (Deut. 4:5–8); his decretive will is that which establishes whatsoever comes to pass (Eph. 1:11).

Why then does God still find fault? If He decrees all that takes place, including the sinful actions of men, how can He hold men responsible for the sinful actions they commit? Paul's discussion of God's sovereignty in Romans 9 raised the same objection. His answer? "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?" God is sov-

Chart 2: **PARTS OF A COVENANT**

**ASPECT OF COVENANT**

	<b>NOAH</b>	<b>ABRAHAM</b>
Promise	Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. (9:11)	I will be a God to you and your children (17:7). You will receive a Seed (15:5). Your descendants will be like the stars (15:5). You will receive a land (12:8). I will bless the world through you (12:3).
Law	Protecting the image of God seems closely related to this covenant. (9:1-7)	Walk before me and be blameless (17:1)
Blessing	Food, multiplication and safety. (9:1-4)	Seed, land, wealth, blessing to the world. See above.
Sign	Rainbow (9:13 ff)	Circumcision (17:9 ff)

Chart 3, continued: **PARTS OF A COVENANT**

ASPECT OF COVENANT	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	QUESTION
Promise	John 17:1-3, Matt. 28:20	<p>What does Christ pray for? What does He promise for His Church?</p> <p>Christ prays that those who believe in Him should have eternal life. Christ says that He will always be with His people.</p>
Law	Rom. 13:9, Gal. 3:13-14;	<p>What is this Law in this passage the same as? What does this tell you about God's rules of righteousness?</p> <p>The Law in the New Testament is exactly the same as the Ten Commandments given in the Old Testament. This shows us that the only standard of righteousness is the unchanging character of God.</p>
Blessing	Rom. 4:12-14; 2 Pet. 2:4-5	<p>Whose blessings has the Church inherited? How has this promise expanded? If we are what II Pe. 2:4-5 says, is the Church still his people?</p> <p>The church has inherited the promises of Abraham. The promises to Abraham have expanded. He was promised the Land of Canaan. The church is promised the world. Peter calls us a holy priesthood. If the church is a holy priesthood, it is certainly His people.</p>
Sign	Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-26	<p>What are the signs of the New Covenant? How do they relate to the sign of Circumcision and Passover given to Israel?</p> <p>The signs of the New Covenant are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is like Circumcision because it marks a person's entrance into God's people. The Lord's Supper is like Passover. It marks the continuing communion that God has with His people.</p>

ereign. He has authority to do with the world as He sees fit (see Romans 9:19-26).

**SUMMA**



Write an essay or discuss this question, integrating what you have learned from the questions above.

*Biblical Analysis*

1. What does it mean that God is sovereign?

Consider the following Scriptures:

- He accomplishes His will (Ps. 115:3; 135:5-7; Dan. 4:17, 34, 35; Eph. 1:11)
- He brings about trivial things (Ex. 34:24; Prov. 16:1, 9, 33)
- Calamity is under His rule (Isa. 45:7; Lam. 3:37, 38)

How can God accomplish His purposes through the sinful actions of human beings and still be holy, just, and good?

God's control over the Universe is complete. He brought the Universe into being. All actions are under His control, even sinful actions. Sins, although they are against God's law, are still used by Him to bring



Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. **JACOB BLESSING THE SONS OF JOSEPH.** 1656. Oil on canvas. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kassel, Germany.

about His plan to redeem His people. Because He controls all things, we can face every circumstance with confidence that all circumstances come from the hand of a loving God.

## OPTIONAL SESSION

### Analyzing the Art

*Begin class by analyzing this painting by Rembrandt.*

1. Who are the characters in this painting?  
Jacob, Joseph, his wife Asenath, and his sons,

Ephraim and Manasseh.

2. Where in Genesis is this scene described?

**Genesis 48**

3. What is Joseph endeavoring to do with Jacob's hand?

Joseph is endeavoring to move his father's hand from the younger son, Ephraim, to the older, Manasseh.

4. Does Rembrandt capture the emotion which the biblical text ascribes to Joseph at this point? What emotion is portrayed?

The biblical text says that Joseph was "displeased." The Joseph in this picture, however, looks rather placid and calm.

5. Which of the boys appears the more pious? Why?

The boy to the right is shining with light. Joseph's coat creates a sort of halo over the boy's head. His position is reverent in contrast with the other who is staring off into space and rather disconnected with the event.

6. What event does this blessing recall from Jacob's own life?

Jacob, like Ephraim, was the younger and was blessed by God.

7. Rembrandt's painting changes a number of things in the biblical text, both by addition and omission.

Can you identify them? Why do you suppose he did this?

Rembrandt omits the crossing of Jacob's hands; he places Ephraim and Manasseh in opposite positions relative to the biblical description which places Ephraim on Joseph's right and Manasseh on his left; he adds Joseph's wife Asenath to the scene; and, as noted above, he alters Joseph's emotion. It is difficult to determine with certainty why he did so. Rembrandt painted some of the most vivid and alluring depictions of biblical scenes. A plausible reason for the change is that he wanted to make the picture accord more with Dutch customs at the time and what would be a typical death bed scene in Holland.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Technically there are eleven sections. The two toledoth sections about Esau have been combined (36:1-8 and 36:9-37:1).
- 2 The identification of Moses as the primary author of Genesis does not exclude some later editorial revisions or additions. For instance, Genesis 11:31 associates Ur with the tribe of the Chaldeans, a group of people who did not emerge until after Moses' death. For a fuller treatment of Mosaic authorship consult Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994) pp. 38-48.
- 3 Some people are uncomfortable describing Adam's relationship with God as a covenant. However, Scripture explicitly identifies this relationship as a covenant (Hos. 6:7), and all the elements of a covenant are present: privileges, expectations, blessings, consequences, etc. For a fuller treatment, see O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980) chapter 5.
- 4 Hebrews 6:13-20 discusses this passage in Genesis 15 and uses it to encourage us to trust in God's faithfulness through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 5 This point is related to the Nicene Creed's statement that Jesus was *genitum non factum* (begotten, not made). Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, meaning of course that Jesus has the same nature as God Himself (Jesus is divine). We are adopted sons of God. We do not have His nature because we are creatures. Nevertheless, through Christ, we receive all the benefits that He as the Son of God deserves. For example, we shall inherit the earth.
- 6 For a fascinating discussion of this question, see James Romaine's chapter on Creativity in: Ned Bustard, ed. *It was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God* (Baltimore: Square Halo Publishing, 2000) pp. 159-201.
- 7 O.P. Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1980) pp. 3-15. This gives the definition for covenant, saying that it is a bond in blood sovereignly administered. For the adventurous student or the inquisitive parent this chapter of this book does a great job explaining covenants.