

# GENESIS

Eden to Exile Leader's Guide

John D. Morrison, PhD

# OT LEADER'S GUIDE

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## GENESIS

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*OT Leader's Guide: Genesis*

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# OT19

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Greetings! Welcome to our journey through the Old Testament from Eden to Exile! I am so excited about what we are going to learn together and how we are going to grow together as we read God's Word together in these next twelve months.

Our reading the New Testament in a year as a church was a much broader and deeper success than we ever imagined. We saw God work in individuals and in relationships as his Word was made a daily priority. God tells us that his Word is powerful to accomplish his purposes (Isaiah 55:10-11), and we saw that on full display last year.

We believe that all of God's Word is, as Paul tells us, "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). It is our commitment as a church to the whole counsel of God that has led us to read the Old Testament this year.

I am even more excited about this year because of a new and added "twist." Each week you'll read from the Old Testament, but you'll also find a devotional for the end of the week written by a member of our Lakewood Team. These devotionals will draw the connection between what you read each day and the New Testament. We are about to discover more regarding the unity of the Scriptures. God's Word tells us the one story of salvation freely offered through Jesus Christ.

Please keep current and encourage others to read along with you. I would love to hear your thoughts and impressions as you reflect on each day's reading. Please email me at [tsmiley@lakewoodlife.org](mailto:tsmiley@lakewoodlife.org)

We are blessed as a ministry to have such a talented, gifted, and doctrinally sound staff who each have the competency to lead us into a deeper understanding of God's Word. As you read their devotional thoughts and commentary, consider letting them know how their words have impacted your daily walk of faith.

Enjoy our journey from Eden to Exile!

Dr. Tom



# INTRODUCTION

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The title “Genesis” comes from the Greek word *genesis*, which means “birth” or “origin.” The Hebrews knew this book as *bereshith*, which is the first word of the book: “in the beginning.” Genesis tells the origin of the earth and of God’s people. Genesis is a book about beginnings. It recounts the beginning of this world and the beginning of humanity. We also read of how sin entered the world, but then Genesis begins to reveal how the Lord will reverse the curse of sin and bless all the peoples of the earth. In Genesis, the Lord promises to bring worldwide blessing, and he begins the work of blessing the world through Abraham and his offspring.

We can view Genesis as having two major sections. The first section provides a broad overview of the origins of human history from the creation of the world to the descendants of Noah’s son, Shem (Gen. 1:1-11:26). This first section details the creation of the world and then reveals the origin of all of human problems in sin, which is our rebellion against God. The Lord promises blessing to counteract our sin, but it is not until the second major section (Gen.

God’s promise to establish his kingdom through his grace that overcomes human sin is the governing theme of Genesis.

Bruce Waltke

11:27-50:26) that we begin to see the unfolding of this promised plan. The second part of Genesis narrows in on Abraham and his descendants as the Lord shows how his blessing will come through this one family.

God’s promise to Abraham Genesis 12:1-3 serves as the hinge of the entire book, and in many ways, we could say these three verses serve as the thesis statement for the whole of Scripture. Chapter 11 ends with a genealogy that quickly covers the ten generations from Noah to Abraham. As chapter 12 begins, the Lord calls Abram, whom he will later rename Abraham:

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will

bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

At this point, the narrative of Genesis focuses in on this one man and his family, for it is through them that the Lord will bless “all the families of the earth.” As the story unfolds, we see that this blessing is nothing less than the reverse of the curse of sin. Our problem is sin, but God promises redemption from our sin.

What becomes clear in Genesis is that it is the Lord who must bring about this promised blessing. Abraham and his descendants prove time and again that they cannot reverse the curse. They themselves are enslaved to sin. They repeatedly fail to obey the Lord in faith. They repeatedly show that they live under the curse. In their own strength, they will never bring blessing to the world. Even when they are faithless, the Lord remains faithful. The Lord himself stands as the hero of Genesis, for he alone is faithful. He alone will reverse the curse of sin and bring blessing to the world.

As we read the rest of Scripture, we come to see that ultimately this promised blessing comes through Jesus Christ. Jesus is descended from Abraham; he is the son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1). He is the promised offspring of Abraham (Gen. 13:15; Gen. 17:8; Rom. 4:13; Gal. 3:16) who will bring blessing to the world. Consider how Paul reflects on this connection between the promise to Abraham and Christ Jesus:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:13–14).

Christ was cursed in order that his people might be blessed. In Christ, the promise made to Abraham comes to fulfillment. In Christ, the promise made to Abraham goes to the nations, to the whole world. In Christ, we see that this promised blessing is nothing short of the God’s presence with us by his Spirit.

## Covenant

The Lord himself will keep his promise and bring blessing to all the families of the earth. The recurring theme of God's faithfulness in Genesis is highlighted by the concept of covenant. There are three major covenants in the book of Genesis: (1) an implied covenant with creation (Gen. 1-3); (2) God's covenant with Noah (Gen. 6:18; 9:8-17); and (3) God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:18; 17:1-21).

Rarely do we use the word covenant today, and when we do, it is not in the same sense that Genesis employs the term. In the Ancient Near East, the time and region of Genesis, the concept of covenant was familiar. Covenants were used to formalize relationships and agreements through a set ceremony. In essence, a covenant was about a commitment or a promise between two parties. Genesis

A covenant is a relationship involving an oath-bound commitment.

Peter Gentry & Stephen Wellum

21:25-34 recounts a covenant like this between Abraham and Abimelech after their servants argued over a well. Their covenant was their way to settle the disagreement. We see a similar use of this term in Genesis 26:28 and Genesis 31:44.

The covenant ceremony of this time was a bloody affair. The initiation of a covenant was described as to "cut a covenant" (*karat berit*). To formalize a covenant between people, animals would be cut in a half, and the two people would walk through the middle of the pieces together. In walking through these pieces of animals, the participants were communicating, "If I do not maintain my end of the covenant, let me become like these animals." By cutting a covenant with someone, you would pledge your life to maintaining your end of the covenant.

As mentioned above, God's promise to Abraham is the hinge of Genesis, and as such, we will focus our attention on God's covenant with Abraham. In his initial promise to Abram (Gen. 12:1-3), the Lord does not use the word covenant. Only in Genesis 15 does the Lord begin to use this term to describe his relationship with Abram. In this chapter, the Lord performs a ceremony that initiates his covenant with Abram. Typically, the two parties covenanting together

would walk through the animals that were cut in two, but after Abram prepared the animals (Gen. 15:9-11), it was the Lord alone who passed through these pieces (Gen. 15:17-18). In this action, the Lord shows his steadfast commitment to maintaining his covenant with Abram. The Lord's faithfulness to his covenant will not depend upon Abram's or his descendant's faithfulness. This covenant will be maintained because the Lord himself will be faithful to it.

The Lord takes the concept of a covenant from this time and adjusts the ceremony to show to Abram and to us that he will keep his promise. His character guarantees the promised blessing, for he is faithful and will keep his word. The Lord's faithfulness comes to fruition in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Through Christ's faithfulness, all the peoples of the earth will be blessed.

### **Application**

In reading Genesis, there are two consistent points of application for us. First, we see our desperate need for God's grace. From the fall to the repeated failures of every major character, we see time and again that humans do not have the strength within themselves to turn back to God and to restore the earth to its original paradise. The Lord must act if his people will be blessed.

Second, we see in Genesis that God is faithful to act for the good of his people. The Lord keeps his promises. God's displays his faithfulness in the way that he works to bring blessing through the promised offspring, Jesus Christ. Throughout the pages of Genesis, we see the Lord at work to fulfill his promise to bless the world and to reverse the curse of sin. The Lord proves himself to be faithful.

The Lord is faithful in the grand sweep of redemptive history, bringing about the promised fulfillment of blessing through Christ, and we see that he is faithful in individual lives. We can trust him in our lives because he has shown himself faithful to us in Christ. As Paul asks in Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" As the Lord has shown himself faithful in the most important ways, we can trust him in our everyday lives.

## Composition

Historically, Moses has been understood to be the author of Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. In the Gospels, it seems clear that Jesus shares this view as he often cites material from the Pentateuch as from Moses. (For example, see Jesus's response to the question of divorce in Matthew 19). Some have questioned this traditional view of Moses as the author because Genesis itself does not attribute the work to a specific author nor does Jesus specifically quote material from Genesis as from Moses. However, given the close association between Moses and the Pentateuch, it seems best to view Moses as the author of Genesis. We should note that in writing Genesis, Moses most likely compiled material from other sources in addition to writing original material. This process would be similar to how Luke describes his own method for writing his Gospel, and as with the Gospel of Luke, we understand Moses's process in writing Genesis to be divinely inspired.

# GENESIS 1-5

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This week's readings form the foundation to our world and to the rest of the biblical story. We hear of the creation of all things, the fall of this world into sin, and are given glimpses of a promise that the Lord will one day restore the brokenness that entered the world through sin.

As we remember that the Lord has given us Scripture to reveal himself to us, one of the key questions to consider in this week's reading is: *who does God reveal himself to be in these first chapters of the Bible?* Think about what these chapters show us about who God is. Also, as you read consider: *what do these chapters reveal about people?* Consider how humanity is seen through the biblical lens.

*Genesis 1.* The first chapter of Scripture is packed full of key theological truths for Christian believers. First, we see that God existed apart from creation. He was God before the world came into being. We know from the rest of Scripture that he has existed eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He did not need to create the world, but he created out of his love and his goodness.

Second, we see in Genesis 1 that God created the entire universe. Nothing exists that he did not create. He created the world, and it belongs to him.

Third, Genesis 1 teaches that creation was good. God did not bring sin into the world. Creation, as he made it, was good.

Fourth, God created all of humanity in his own image, and he gave humanity the purpose of filling the earth, ruling over it, and caring for it (Gen. 1:26-31).

*Genesis 2.* Chapter 2 begins with God's resting from the work of creation and then focuses in on the creation of man and woman. Genesis 1 gave the overview of creation, and now Genesis 2 details how the creation of the first humans took place.

*Genesis 3.* This passage recounts the fall of humanity into sin, and then the curse of God upon humanity and the earth for Adam and

Eve's sin. Notice, however, that even in the curse, there is a glimmer of hope (Gen. 3:15).

*Genesis 4.* This chapter shows us the far-reaching consequences of sin. The depth of human sin comes quickly as a man kills his own brother (Gen. 4:1-16) and another boasts of sexual conquests and violent temper (4:23-24).

*Genesis 5.* Genesis 5 advances the story of the world from the first family to the days of Noah. This genealogy shows how Genesis is written to be a historical account; it is tracing human history and showing the connections between generations.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Gen. 1:1 | Why is it important that we as Christians affirm that God created the heavens and the earth? What implications does his role as creator have on our lives today?
- Why does Genesis 1 repeat the refrain, “And God saw that it was good,” and then conclude with, “Behold, it was very good”? Why is this such an important affirmation for Scripture to make?
- Gen. 1:26-31 | What does it mean that God created humans in his own image? What does the fact that every single person is a divine image bearer mean for the value of each and every human life? How do we live on a daily basis to show that all people have value as image bearers of God?
- Gen. 2:15 | What does it tell us about our purpose as humans that work existed even before our fall into sin?
- Gen. 2:22-25 | Consider how the NT interprets this passage in Matthew 19:5 and Ephesians 5:31. What does this passage in Genesis teach us about the nature of marriage?
- Gen. 3:1 | Was the serpent accurate in his representation of God's words? How is this similar to how we're tempted today?
- Gen. 3:15 | Who is this promised offspring? As you read through Genesis, notice that this promised offspring or seed because a recurring theme. God's people begin to look for the promised One who will fulfill God's word.

- Gen. 4:3-7 | Why was Cain angry and jealous with his brother? What does this episode with Cain teach us about the nature of sin?
- Gen. 4:23-24 | Why would this episode be included in the Genesis? How does it serve to underscore the point of this chapter?
- Gen. 5:28-31 | Noah's name means rest. His father (v. 29) seems to hope that Noah will be the promised one (Gen. 3:15) who brings relief from the curse of the ground. In what way does Noah bring such rest? How is this desire for rest left unfulfilled in Noah?

### **New Testament Connection**

Consider how the NT describes the role of Jesus in creation in John 1 and Colossians 1.

Also, look at the comparison Paul makes between Adam and Jesus in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-22.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

*Creation.* There exists much debate between Christians over the proper way to interpret Genesis 1-2. Discussions include the age of the earth, whether or not the days of creation are twenty-four hour days, if God used macro-evolutionary processes, and whether or not Adam and Eve were real people. Much of these debates arise from the question of the role of science in helping us understand the Bible and whether science or Scripture should be the final authority. However, debates over the interpretation of Genesis 1-2 are not new. The church has wrestled with how to best understand the creation account for its history.

In the midst of these debates, it is helpful to ask: what must we affirm as Christians? What are the essential truths that we are called to believe in the creation account of Genesis? I believe there are five essential truths that Christians should affirm from Genesis 1-2:

1. God is the creator of the whole universe. The world did not exist, and he brought it into existence out of nothing.
2. Creation, as God made it, was good. There was no sin or evil in the world.
3. God created all people in his image.

4. Adam and Eve were historical people. (For the importance of Adam as a historical figure, see how Paul understands him in relation to Jesus Christ in Romans 5).
5. Sin and death entered the world through human disobedience.

These five truths do not delve into the details of how God created or how long he took, but they do focus on our fundamental beliefs about God, humans, and sin.

*Long Life-Spans.* The lives listed in Genesis seem incredibly long-lived compared with what we expect in our own day. We have seen earlier that Genesis is written as history, and these ages do not lend themselves to symbolic interpretation. It seems best to understand the listed ages as the actual ages of historical people, but as Christians reading the Bible, we also want to understand why these ages are included. What is the point? I would suggest that the ages show the effects of the curse of sin on the world. The constant refrain in the genealogy of Genesis 5 is “and he died.” Death reigns supreme (except in the case of Enoch. See below for more on him). The general pattern is for the lives to be shorter and shorter. Sick is sickness ravaging the world, and as that sickness spreads, human life becomes shorter and shorter. These early chapters of Genesis continue to show us how sin has ruined God’s good creation.

*Enoch.* Genesis 5:24 records, “Enoch walked with God, and he was not for God took him.” Where the rest of the genealogy in this section records, “And he died,” the end of Enoch’s life on earth is described, “He was not for God took him.” The author of Hebrews points to Enoch as a paragon of faith who did not see death (11:5). Exactly how he did not see death is unclear, but Scripture emphasizes why: “Enoch walked with God.” Twice in these three verses, the Bible says that Enoch walked with God, which points to him as one who lived a life of faithful devotion. Enoch’s life is a contrast to the reign of death seen since Genesis 3. In Enoch’s life, we see that God’s merciful purposes are even greater than death.

# GENESIS 6-10

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Our reading this week primarily covers the account of Noah and connects the beginning of creation to the time of Abraham. In this week's reading, we continue to see the effects of sin. Humans continue to rebel and to forsake God. In response, God judges the earth, sending a flood that cleanses the earth of the evildoers. After the flood, we read what amounts to a second creation account, but we see that humanity does not just need a new start. We need new hearts.

*Genesis 6.* Chapter 6 begins the flood narrative as the Lord looks over the earth and sees the wickedness of humanity. His judgment of man at this point is severe: "Every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (6:5). Evil in and of itself is bad, but people's evil was also corrupting the earth and leading to violence (6:11-12). The Lord brought the flood to judge the world and to cleanse the earth of evil.

*Genesis 7.* This chapter records the beginning of the flood.

*Genesis 8.* Genesis 8 marks the end of the flood account, and in some ways echoes the creation account from Genesis 1.

*Genesis 9.* Genesis 9 continues with the end of the flood narrative from chapter 8 and clearly echoes the creation account. This chapter also ends with a strange episode between Noah and his son Ham that points to the continued sinfulness of humanity even after the flood.

*Genesis 10.* 10:1-11:9 form a unit in Genesis that interweaves God's blessing and curse. In 10:1-32, we see the fulfillment of the commands in 1:28 and 9:1: humanity is multiplying, filling the earth, and ruling over it. However, 11:1-9 will show that all is not well.

## Discussion Questions

- Gen. 6 | Why did God judge the earth? How do we try to convince ourselves that God doesn't take our sin seriously? Why is believing God doesn't judge sin such a dangerous lie to believe? How do we correct such thinking in ourselves?

- Gen. 6 | How do we see God's grace in his judgment of the world?
- Gen. 7:5 | Reflect on this one verse. What is so remarkable about Noah's obedience? How is such obedience possible?
- Gen. 7:16 | Notice how the Lord continues to provide graciously for Noah and his family even in the midst of this flood. How can you see God's goodness to you even in the most difficult of times?
- Gen. 8:1 | How is the fact that God notices and remembers individual people an encouragement to us? Compare the second part of this verse with Gen. 1:2, keeping in mind that wind and Spirit are the same word in Hebrew. Why would 8:1 intentionally echo 1:2?
- Gen. 8:20-21 | Noah responds to God's deliverance with a sacrifice. It is best to understand this as a sacrifice for both thanksgiving and for atonement for sin. How does the Lord respond to this sacrifice? Why is it good news for humanity that the Lord accepts substitutionary sacrifices? Compare 6:5 and 8:21. Has the flood changed the basic condition of the human heart?
- Gen. 9:1 | How does 9:1 compare with 1:28? Why does Genesis picture the earth after the flood as a second creation?
- Gen. 9:9 | In 6:18 and here in 9:9, God speaks of making a covenant with Noah. What is a covenant? Why would the Lord describe his relationship with Noah in this way?
- Gen. 9:18-24 | How does Noah's drunkenness compare with Adam's sin in Gen. 3? Why is it so abhorrent that Ham delighted in his fathers' shame? What does chapter 9 teach us about human nature after the flood?
- Gen. 10 | What role does this genealogy play in the narrative of Genesis?

### **New Testament Connection**

In Hebrews 11:7 and 2 Peter 2:4-10, two NT authors reflect on the account of Noah and the flood. What lessons do they draw from Noah for our lives as believers today?

Consider also how the sins of Noah and Ham after the flood point to our need for a greater savior. People did not just need a fresh start on the earth, but we need new hearts that desire God and seek him.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

*Genesis 6:1-4.* This passage is arguably the most challenging to interpret in all of Genesis. The crux of the problem in understanding this passage is who are the “sons of God.” Three groups are typically identified as options for the “sons of God:” (1) angels, (2) descendants from Seth, and (3) tyrannical human rulers. Part of the challenge in properly identifying this group is that the phrase ‘sons of God’ is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe angels and humans in different instances.

The first view understands “sons of God” as angels. It is unclear how this would work, but we do see elsewhere in Genesis that angels took on bodies and ate food. The view of the “sons of God” as angels seems to be the understanding behind such passages as 1 Peter 3:19-20 and Jude 6-7.

The language of 6:1 seems to rule out option two that the ‘sons of God’ are descendants of Seth who mixed with women from the line of Cain. The language of men multiplying in 6:1 seems to be speaking about all humanity in general and not just a specific line.

Tyrannical rulers seems to be a stronger option because these men potentially claimed divine status all the while perverting justice, forming harems, and misappropriating God’s command to rule and to reign over the other. Some commentators combine this view with the first, arguing that these rulers were possessed by fallen angels.

Personally, I am inclined on the basis of the NT evidence toward option one, but the lack of clarity with this passage should lead us all to hold our views of this passage loosely.

What is clear is that these verses serve to show the expanding wickedness on the earth. Sin continues to infect the world and bring ruin to it.

# GENESIS 11-15

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These chapter begins with the Tower of Babel and then transition to the story of Abraham, moving from a broad view of human history to focus in on a single family. Yet, even with the scattering of nations at Babel and this focus on a particular people, God has not forgotten the rest of the world. In fact, it is through Abraham's offspring that the Lord will bless all the peoples of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3). God's blessing of the world will come through this one, particular family.

As we read these chapters, we can gain much from the example of Abraham. He is a hero of our faith (Hebrews 11), and yet, Genesis reveals that it is the Lord himself who is the true hero of this story. Abraham exercises faith on numerous occasions, and yet he also repeatedly fails to be faithful. The Lord, however, is faithful. He keeps his covenant with Abraham and will bring about this blessing of the world even when his servants fail.

*Genesis 11.* Genesis 11 begins with the Tower of Babel and ends with the story of Abram and his family.

*Genesis 12.* This chapter begins with God's promise to bless Abram and through him to bless the world. Gen. 12:1-3 are some of the most important verses in Scripture. God's focus on this one particular family is in order to bring blessing to the world. From the NT perspective, we know that this universal blessing will come only through Jesus Christ.

*Genesis 13.* Abram and Lot separate because the same area could no longer support both of their growing herds. In 13:14-17, the Lord reiterates his promise to Abram.

*Genesis 14.* Lot is taken captive, and Abram rescues him. In this chapter, we meet Melchizedek, who is only mentioned one other time in the Old Testament (Psalm 110), but the author of Hebrews shows us that Melchizedek is a type (a foreshadowing) of Christ himself (Hebrews 7).

*Genesis 15.* In this chapter, the Lord reaffirms his promise to Abram through a covenant cutting ceremony. See the introduction for more

information on covenants and a discussion of what makes this covenant unique.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Gen. 11:1-9 | Why was the Lord displeased with the Tower of Babel? How are we tempted in our own ways to disobey the Lord by staying put and trying to make a name for ourselves?
- Gen. 12 | Why did the Lord call Abram? Is there any indication that Abram worshipped the Lord or was particularly faithful?
- Gen. 12:1-3 | What does God promise to Abram? How does the Lord fulfill this promise in Jesus?
- Gen. 12:10-20 | What does the account reveal about Abram at this point? Would you describe him as someone who is trusting the Lord? Do you find yourself trusting the Lord's major promises in your life (e.g. redemption in Christ) but have trouble trusting him for daily provision?
- Gen. 13:14-17 | How does the Lord's promise here compare with Gen. 12:1-3? In what ways are they similar? Different? Why would the Lord reiterate this promise after Abram and Lot separate?
- Gen. 14:17-23 | Read Hebrews 7. How does the author of Hebrews point to Melchizedek in order to help us better understand Jesus's ministry?
- Gen. 15:1-6 | Notice how in 15:1-2, Abram is viewing the Lord's promise from an earthly perspective; he cannot see how God could possibly fulfill the promise he's made. Do you find yourself like Abram in these verses, having trouble believing that the Lord can do as he promised? How do we get to the faith of Abram in 15:6?
- Gen. 15:7-20 | What is significant about this covenant cutting ceremony? What promises does the Lord reiterate in this chapter?

### **New Testament Connection**

Consider how the author of Hebrews makes use of Melchizedek to explain the work of Christ. See particularly Hebrews 7.

In Romans 4:1-25, Paul discusses what it means for Abraham to be justified by faith.

# GENESIS 16-20

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These five chapters show that from a human perspective God's promises often seem threatened and like they will not come to fruition. However, mixed in with these challenges to God's promises, these chapters assure us that the Lord will be faithful to fulfill his promises.

*Genesis 16.* In Genesis 16, Abram and Sarai try to fulfill God's promises through their own efforts. Their plan to take ensure an heir for Abram demonstrates their lack of trust in the Lord.

*Genesis 17.* Despite Abram and Sarai's lack of faith, the Lord remains faithful to his covenant. In this chapter, he affirms his covenant with Abram and emphasizes that it is an everlasting covenant. God also gives Abram circumcision as a sign of that covenant, and the Lord further indicates his intention to keep the covenant by changing Abram's name to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude." He also changes Sarai to Sarah in connection with the promise of Isaac, which God reiterates in this passage.

*Genesis 18.* The Lord once again appears to Abraham to confirm his promise of a child, and then God turns toward the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham will intercede for Lot and his family, and the Lord promises to spare them. After the fall of humans into sin, Genesis traces God's work to restore people to communion with him as we once had in the Garden. Genesis 18 shows us two elements necessary for this restoration: blessing and judgment. For the world to be reconciled to God, we need the promised blessing that will come through Isaac's offspring, Jesus Christ. Reconciliation also means that sin must be judged. God will rid the world of evil in order to reconcile us to himself. The challenge for us is that in order to deal with sin and evil, God must deal with us. Judgment of sin cannot be as simple as separating the good people from the bad people. In his *Gulag Archipelago*, Alexander Solzhenitsyn puts this idea in stark relief:

If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate

them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

The question before us in the OT is how will God bring about this restoration that involves both blessing and judgment. The answer comes in the cross of Christ where God's mercy and holiness together are on full display.

*Genesis 19.* The Lord rescues Lot and his family from Sodom, but as they flee, Lot's wife disobeys and turns into a pillar of salt. After their deliverance, there is the sordid affair with Lot and his daughters. There are strong parallels here with Noah after the flood. You have God's deliverance, human drunkenness, and shameful behavior between a father and children. As with Noah, one of the points this narrative makes is that a new location is not enough to change people; we need new hearts.

*Genesis 20.* This is almost an exact repeat of Abraham and Sarah's interaction with Pharaoh in Genesis 12:10-20. On a personal level, we see that sinning repeatedly in the same way is not a new phenomenon. On a macro level, this episode causes us to ask: can the Lord's plan be thwarted by Abraham's lack of faith? Or, can the Lord's plan be thwarted by the king's desires? In both cases, the answer is a resounding, "No." Rather, God's plan will succeed despite human failure.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Gen. 16:1-15 | Have you ever tried to fulfill a good purpose of God in your own strength and timing only to see it fail? What does this passage teach us about the nature of faith? What does it teach us about who God is?
- Gen. 17:1-8 | Why do you think the Lord chose to reiterate his covenant with Abraham at this point? What does 17:7 mean that this is an "everlasting covenant"? How would that have been an encouragement to Abraham? Looking back at this promise through the cross, how is the everlasting nature of this covenant an encouragement for us?

- Gen. 18:16-33 | What does this passage (and Gen. 19:1-29) teach us about the character of God? Where do we see both judgment and grace in these episodes?
- Gen. 19:30-38 | Why would this episode be included in Genesis? What purpose does it serve? How does this episode connect with the gospel?
- Gen. 20:1-18 | How often do we sin in the exact same manner as before? Why? How does the free grace of the gospel help us fight sin?
- Gen. 20:1-18 | Can the Lord's plan be stopped because of Abraham's lack of faith? Can the Lord's plan be stopped because of a king's desires? How should this truth encourage us?

### **New Testament Connection**

In Galatians 3-4, Paul connects the Lord's promise to Abraham to believers today. Look particularly at who are considered sons of Abraham in Gal. 3:7, 29. Consider Gal. 4:6-7 and what being a son of God means for all who trust in Christ by faith. Also, look at how Paul uses the example of Sarah and Hagar in Gal. 4:21-31.

## **GENESIS 21-25**

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In these chapters, we find the pinnacle of God and Abraham's relationship. The Lord proves himself to be faithful through the birth of Isaac, and then Abraham puts his faith into action as he trusts the Lord through the binding of Isaac on Mount Moriah. As these chapters draw to a close, we begin to see how the Lord will carry on his blessing to Abraham's family through Isaac and then Jacob.

*Genesis 21.* Isaac, the promised son, is born to Sarah and Abraham, and yet God does not forget Hagar and Ishmael. Although the promised blessing will come through Isaac, the Lord is still merciful in protecting and blessing Ishmael.

*Genesis 22.* In this chapter, the Lord calls upon Abraham to take his son and to sacrifice him. Genesis makes clear that this is a test of Abraham's faith, and Abraham shows that he will trust the Lord. Hebrews 11:17-19 explains that Abraham believed that the Lord

could raise Isaac from the dead. In many ways, this is the highpoint of Abraham's faith. Through all his struggles to believe and to wait upon the Lord, now, he trusts that even if he were to kill his son, the Lord would still be good and faithful to his promises. This event clearly foreshadows what will happen with the sacrifice of Christ. John 3:16 and Romans 8:32 echo the language of "only son," applying these words to Christ. Abraham spoke even truer than he knew when he told Isaac, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (Gen. 22:8).

*Genesis 23.* This chapter records the death of Sarah and the purchase of her grave. It is interesting to note that Abraham still describes himself as a sojourner and foreigner among these people in the land of Canaan. The Lord had promised Abraham this land, and yet he still does not have a piece of property on which he could bury his wife. Sarah's burial place seems to be the first piece of land in Canaan that Abraham and his family possess. We are reminded in Hebrews 11:9-10 that even with the promise of the land, Abraham was looking forward to a city "whose designer and builder is God."

*Genesis 24.* Here in this chapter is the account of Isaac and Rebekah's marriage. The faith of Abraham's servant (Gen. 24:12-14) is noteworthy. Rebekah also demonstrates great faith. Like Abraham, she is willing to leave her own country, people, and father's house and go to the place where the Lord would take her.

*Genesis 25.* Abraham dies and the twins are born to Isaac. One generation ends and the next begins. With Esau and Jacob, we read that Jacob valued the promise of God upon his family, but Esau despised it and valued a bowl of stew over God's promise.

## **Discussion Questions**

- Gen. 21:8-20 | How does God reveal his character in this episode with Ishmael and Hagar?
- Gen. 22:5-8 | How do we see Abraham's faith in this passage? Consider Hebrews 11:17-19. How do you think the previous testings and even failures of Abraham faith prepared him for this test? Have you ever looked back on your life and considered how God used past challenges to your faith to prepare you for current challenges?

- Gen. 22:8, 13 | Abraham says the Lord will provide a lamb, but then he finds a ram in the thicket. Was he wrong? Or, is there another lamb?
- Gen. 22:15-18 | How does God respond to Abraham's faith?
- Gen. 24 | Reflect on the faith of Abraham's servant and Rebekah. How do these two demonstrate faith similar to that of Abraham? Consider the similarities between Rebekah's move and Abraham's call in Gen. 12:1-3.
- Gen. 25:29-34 | Read Hebrews 12:15-17 and consider how Hebrews uses Esau as a warning for us. How are we tempted to let our worldly desires distract us from the promises of God?

### **New Testament Connection**

Consider how Hebrews 11:8-22 reflects on Abraham's faith in the binding of Isaac. In James 2:18-24, James points to the way Abraham's faith led him to obedience. You might also consider how this episode points forward to the sacrifice of God's only Son.

In Hebrews 12:15-17, the author points to Esau as a warning to all those who would be tempted to turn away from Christ.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

*Genesis 22.* How could God ask Abraham to kill his son Isaac? This call to sacrifice seems to run against God's character, and it will become clear in the law of Moses that God abhors child sacrifice (Lev. 18:1; 20:1-5). However, in this episode, the Lord is testing Abraham and does not intend for him actually to kill Isaac (Gen. 22:16-18). This binding of Isaac is a test of Abraham's faith to see if he will obey God even in the face of contradiction. After all that the Lord has been with Abraham through and all the promises fulfilled, the question before Abraham is whether he will still view God's promises from a merely human perspective or whether he will trust the Lord himself. God has shown himself faithful to Abraham time and time again, and in this episode Abraham trusts the Lord he has come to know since he was called from Ur to Canaan. Bruce Waltke describes this scene as "the climax of Abraham's radical obedience, but also the climax of God's guarantee of offspring to Abraham." God is faithful. God will keep his word to give Abraham a son.

In this episode, we see the extent of Abraham's faith. He is willing to trust the Lord even when it does not make sense. He will believe and then he will seek to understand. We also see that faith and obedience go together. True faith is a lived faith. True faith leads to obedience. Finally, this chapter shows us the gracious nature of substitution. God provided a ram in the thicket to take Isaac's place (Gen. 22:13), but one day he would provide the promised lamb (Gen. 22:8) to serve as the substitute for sinners from around the world and throughout history.

## GENESIS 26-30

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These chapters take us from Isaac to how the Lord will fulfill his promise to Abraham through Jacob. The fulfillment of God's plan faces numerous challenges - often from the very people he is trying to bless - and yet, the Lord remains faithful. He will bring about this promise to bless the nations through Abraham's offspring even when Abraham's descendants act in less than faithful ways.

*Genesis 26.* In this chapter, God twice affirms that he will fulfill the promise to Abraham through Isaac (Gen. 26:2-5; 26:23-25). Yet, in between these two promises, Isaac displays a remarkable lack of faith (just like his father) and lies about his marriage to Rebekah. Through all this, we see that it is through the Lord's faithfulness that the covenant with Abraham will be fulfilled.

*Genesis 27.* Jacob and Rebekah deceive the aging Isaac, so that Jacob will receive the blessing intended for Esau. This is to fulfill Gen. 25:23 where God declares, "The older will serve the younger." The Lord can use even unethical behavior to fulfill his purposes. Even when his people are not faithful, God is faithful. God had purposed that the blessing would go through Jacob, and he fulfilled that purpose (Malachi 1:2-3; Romans 9:6-16).

*Genesis 28.* Following his father's instructions, Jacob leaves his family to go in search of a wife. In contrast to his brother, Esau stays and marries an Ishmaelite against his father's wishes. Jacob has a dream during his journey from Canaan where the Lord promises to bless him and his descendants (Gen. 28:13-15).

*Genesis 29.* This chapter recounts Jacob's marriages to Rachael and Leah. The deceiver is deceived. Laban turns out to be just as deceptive as Jacob, and yet it will be through Laban's deception that the twelve sons of Jacob will be born, beginning the twelve tribes of Israel.

*Genesis 30.* A deceptive and jealous father-in-law and having two sisters for wives has led to a great deal of strife in the life of Jacob and his family. Amazingly, neither Jacob's nor Laban's deception can stop God's promise. Neither barrenness nor marital strife proves too much to prevent God from continuing to fulfill Gen. 12:1-3. He will bless the nations through Abraham's offspring.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Gen. 26:6-11 | How is Isaac's failure like that of his father? Do you think we are prone to repeat the sins of our parents? How, in God's grace, do we fight sin? On the level of God's redemptive purposes, who is going to keep the covenant that the God promises (Gen. 26:2-5; 26:23-25)?
- Gen. 27 | How should it encourage us that the Lord can fulfill his purposes despite and even through people's sinful deeds?
- Gen. 28:20-21 | Even with this revelation, Jacob remains unsure. He only makes a conditional vow with the Lord. He's trying to negotiate with God. Have you ever tried to make a deal with God? Why doesn't this work? Why don't we need to negotiate with the Lord?
- Gen. 29 | Compare Jacob's actions with Abraham's servant in Genesis 24. Who was more commendable? Why?
- Gen. 30 | Can God's promises be thwarted by Jacob's or Laban's deception? Is barrenness or marital strife too much for the Lord to handle? How should these truths encourage us in our daily faith?

### **New Testament Connection**

In 2 Corinthians 1:20, Paul says that all the promises of the Old Testament find their fulfillment in Christ. All the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are moving toward their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

# GENESIS 31-35

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Through the course of these chapters, Jacob flees Laban and comes to settle in the land where Abraham and Isaac sojourned. Along the way, we see the development of Jacob's faith in the Lord, but while he has grown in his trust of God, he is far from perfect. As with Abraham and Isaac, it becomes clear that in order for the covenant to be kept, it is the Lord who must fulfill it.

*Genesis 31.* Jacob flees Laban with Rachael, Leah, their children, and their herds. The Lord calls Jacob back to Canaan, the land of promise, and the Lord even promises his presence with Jacob. Yet, Jacob still fears Laban and feels the need to try and deceive his father-in-law in order to obey God. The lack of complete faith in the Lord is also reflected in the incident of 31:30-35 where Rachael has stolen Laban's household gods and deceives her father about it. Clearly, she too does not trust the Lord completely to provide.

*Genesis 32.* Having escaped Laban, Jacob remains fearful of Esau and arranges a plan in an attempt to appease his brother's anger. As Jacob prepares to meet his brother, he wrestles with God, and the Lord changes his name from "Jacob" to "Israel," which means, "He strives with God."

*Genesis 33.* Jacob and Esau meet again, but Esau is not angry. Rather, he runs to embrace his brother. Out of his previous doubts, Jacob now comes to worship the Lord as his own God (33:5).

*Genesis 34.* While Jacob has begun to worship the Lord as his own God, Jacob continues to be far from a perfect figure. In this chapter, his daughter Dinah is raped by a local prince. Jacob's sons, especially Simeon and Levi who are Dinah's full brothers, are enraged by this sexual assault perpetrated against their sister. Jacob, however, remains remarkably passive. The account is silent on his emotional response to the event, and he sees no need to reach out to his sons and bring them home in this time of crisis (34:5). Instead, he is more concerned with his own well-being and safety than that of his daughter (34:30). Jacob's sons are outraged by what has happened to their sister, but their reaction is fueled by rage rather than justice.

They never seek the Lord about what to do, and they turn circumcision, a sign of God's blessing, into a means of death for their enemies. In comparison with the laws set forth in Deuteronomy 22:28-29, the death they inflicted on all the men of the city far outweighs a punishment that accords the crime of one man.

*Genesis 35.* Jacob moves his family to Bethel, and the Lord again changes his name to Israel. God affirms his covenant with Israel, and Isaac and Rachael die. Jacob and his family are now back in the land where Abraham and Isaac lived.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Gen. 31 | How would you describe the strength of Jacob's faith after the promise of 31:3? Does he act as if he believes the Lord's promise will be true? Do you ever find yourself like Jacob believing that God's promises will be true but that it's up to you to make them happen?
- Gen. 32:9-12 | How does this prayer compare with Jacob's attempt to bargain with God in Gen. 28:20-21? What does such a change reveal about the development of Jacob's faith? How can we pray more like this prayer and less like Jacob's earlier negotiation?
- Gen. 33 | How has Esau changed since we last read about him? What would it take for you to forgive a past wrong committed against you? Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:21-35.
- Gen. 34 | How would you describe Jacob's response to the assault of his daughter? Is Jacob right to condemn his sons here? What's the point of this story? How does it contribute to the narrative of Genesis?
- Gen. 35:9-15 | How does God's promise here compare with Jacob's failure in the previous chapter? Look back over some of the great failures of Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob. What does the Lord almost always seem to do after they fail? What does this teach about who will be faithful to keep the covenant promised to Abraham (and before that to Adam and Eve in Gen. 3:15)?

## New Testament Connection

Throughout these chapters Jacob proves himself to be fearful of others. He fears Laban (31:17-21), Esau (32-33), Hamor (34:5-6), and the Canaanites and the Perizzites (34:30). How does his attitude compare with Paul's in Galatians 1:10? Why are we tempted to fear men rather than God? How do we develop a proper fear of the Lord and overcome our fear of others?

# GENESIS 36-40

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Chapter 36 recounts the descendants of Esau, and then from 37 to the end of the book, Genesis follows the line of Jacob, particularly through his son Joseph. In these final chapters, we see how the Lord will maintain the line of Abraham through intra-family strife and a widespread famine to become a numerous people.

*Genesis 36.* This chapter chronicles Esau's genealogy. The Lord still blesses Esau in a number of ways, but he is not the one through whom God will bring the promised blessing to the nations.

*Genesis 37.* In this chapter, we are introduced to Jacob's son, Joseph. Joseph seems far from wise in dealing with his brothers and is perhaps a bit full of himself. He tattles on his brothers (37:2), and then he tells them how is going to rule over them (37:5-9). Jacob does not help Joseph's situation at all by treating Joseph with the favor normally reserved for the eldest son (37:3). Joseph's brothers are filled with hatred and jealousy toward him (37:4, 11), and these feelings lead the brothers to consider killing him and then to settle on selling him into slavery.

*Genesis 38.* Judah's son, Er, marries Tamar, but he dies before they have any children. When Er dies, Judah and his other sons fail to do right by Tamar to ensure that Er has sons (which would also provide Tamar with family to care for her). Tamar takes matters into her own hands and seduces Judah and conceives twins: Perez and Zerah. This sexually explicit chapter shockingly interrupts the Joseph narrative, so it is important to consider why it is included in Genesis. In many ways, this chapter is building toward Jacob's blessing in Gen. 49. This chapter sets the stage for answering the question of who will rule

over the brothers of Israel. It should have been the eldest Reuben, but his disobedience lost him that right (Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4). Next in line were Simeon and Levi, but their actions in response to Dinah forfeited their rights (Gen. 34; 49:5-7). Next in line is Judah, but he and his sons are far from upstanding, and so in a surprise turn, it will be through Perez that Judah will rule over Israel (Gen. 49:8-12). In Ruth 4:18-22, we see that the line of Perez will lead to King David.

*Genesis 39.* Joseph is bought by Potiphar and serves as a slave in his house. Even as a slave, the Lord's hand is upon Joseph as he makes Joseph prosper in this role. However, all is not well, for Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Joseph, and when this fails, she claims that he attempted to rape her. This charge will land Joseph in prison.

*Genesis 40.* In prison, Joseph continues to experience the Lord's blessing. God gives Joseph the ability to interpret dreams, and Joseph seems to continue to trust the Lord through all of these trials.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Gen. 36:8 | Compare where Esau ends up with where Jacob is in 37:1. How do the brothers' different locations underscore different futures for them and for their descendants?
- Gen. 37:1-11 | How would you describe Joseph in these verses? Do you see him as a commendable figure? Do you think part of Joseph's time in Egypt might be for the Lord to refine and to mature him?
- Gen. 38:26 | Do you agree with Judah's assessment of Tamar? Consider Ruth 4:18-22. How is the Lord able to use even this sordid incident between Judah and Tamar to advance his plan?
- Gen. 39:13 | How is Joseph a model for how we should react to temptation? Should we expect pursuing righteousness to be easy and to lead to rewards in this life?
- Gen. 40:23 | Once freed, the cupbearer forgot Joseph in prison. Who has remembered and been with Joseph through all of his trials? How are you encouraged by the truth that the Lord always remembers his people? Considering what Joseph endured, how should we put Hebrews 13:3 into practice?

## New Testament Connection

Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery, and it is his being sold that ultimately lead to their deliverance from famine. Through their betrayal, God's people are preserved. Consider the parallels with Matthew 26:14-16 and Matthew 27:3-10 where Jesus is betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. How did his betrayal lead to the deliverance of his people?

# GENESIS 41-45

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This section of Genesis begins with Joseph's rise from prison through his divinely-given ability to interpret dreams. He rightly understands Pharaoh's dream to be a prediction of coming famine, and Pharaoh puts Joseph in a position of authority to prepare for this famine. Once the famine comes, the sons of Israel come to Egypt for food. Joseph immediately recognizes them, but they do not know who he is until he reveals himself.

*Genesis 41.* Through the Lord's help, Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream to be a prediction of seven years of plentiful harvests that will be followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh takes Joseph from prison and elevates him to second in command over Egypt. He gives Joseph a wife, and together they have two sons.

*Genesis 42.* Joseph's story once again intersects with his family. They, too, are suffering from the famine, and Joseph's brothers come to Egypt in search of food. Joseph recognizes them and accuses them of being spies. He instigates a plan in order to be able to see Benjamin, his youngest brother.

*Genesis 43.* Simeon was left in Egypt as collateral for Benjamin, but Israel was unwilling to let his youngest son leave. Now, however, the famine has proved so severe that the brothers must make another trip, and they persuade Israel that Benjamin must go with them if they are to get any food. Israel relents, and Benjamin joins them on their journey to Egypt.

*Genesis 44-45.* Joseph contrives a plan to make it appear as though Benjamin stole a silver cup. Joseph's motivation is not completely

clear, but seems to desire to see Benjamin as well to put the other brothers to the test. Finally, Joseph reveals his true identity.

### Discussion Questions

- Gen. 41:52 | Have you seen the Lord take affliction in your life and bring good fruit out of it?
- Gen. 42:21-22, 36-38 | How has the brothers' sin against Joseph affected their family for the last 20 years? How does even a "private" sin affect our relationships with others?
- Gen. 43-44 | What do you make of Joseph's delay in revealing himself? Is he testing his brothers? Is he trying to decide what to do? What was his goal in hiding the silver cup with Benjamin?
- Gen. 45:7-8 | Who does Joseph see as responsible for his time in Egypt? How can he have that perspective? How does his understanding of the source of the affliction in his life enable him to handle it?

### New Testament Connection

Joseph embodies the teaching of James in James 1:2-4. How are you able to "count it all joy" when you face trials and afflictions?

## GENESIS 46-50

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Israel and his family settle in Egypt in order to survive the famine. They have the Lord's blessing to leave Canaan as seen in the Lord's revelation to Israel at the beginning of chapter 46 and the blessings Israel pronounces on his sons in chapters 48 and 49. Also, these chapters indicate that the people of Israel are growing and that the Lord will bless them. If they are blessed and a great nation, how will the promise of the land be fulfilled? That question will begin to be answered in the book of Exodus.

*Genesis 46.* The Lord reaffirms his promises to Jacob, and he reassures Jacob that he should in fact leave the promised land to go to Egypt. This move from Canaan to Egypt will not prevent the promise of land to Abraham from being fulfilled. The whole of Israel's family journeys to Egypt.

*Genesis 47.* Joseph ensures that his family will be cared for and will have land in the area of Goshen. Joseph also ensures that the people of Egypt will survive the famine, but through his shrewd administration he increases the wealth of Pharaoh. Genesis does not emphasize the wealth of Pharaoh but draws a sharp contrast between the family of Israel who thrives and the Egyptians who are losing everything.

*Genesis 48-49.* In these two chapters, Israel blesses his sons. He adopts Joseph's first two sons as his own and elevates them to the status of sons. They are able to have a double portion because they supersede their father, and they take the place of Levi. With the blessings of the other brothers, notice Reuben, Simeon, and Levi are not blessed because of their past sins.

*Genesis 50.* Israel has died, and Joseph's brothers fear that Joseph will not exact revenge for their selling him into slavery. Instead, Joseph emphasizes that it was God's plan to bring him to Egypt in order to save many people and to preserve God's people. God would preserve the descendants of Abraham in order that he might fulfill the promise of Genesis 12.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Gen. 46 | What does Joseph's care for his family reveal about his attitude toward them? How was he able to forgive such horrendous treatment? Is there someone that the Lord is calling on you to forgive?
- Gen. 47:29-31 | What does Israel want to be buried in Canaan?
- Gen. 49:8-12 | How is this prophecy concerning Judah fulfilled in both the Old and New Testaments?
- Gen. 50:15-21 | What does Joseph teach about the origin and purpose of affliction? What was God's purpose in Joseph's hardships? Will we always see God's purpose for our trials in this life? How can we trust God even in our afflictions?

### **New Testament Connection**

Read Romans 8 and pay particular attention to verses 28-29. What is the good that the Lord brings about for his people through all

circumstances? Verse 29 highlights conformity to the image of Christ as the good that God is working for in our lives.



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