



In the Beginning

Studies in Genesis



The book of Genesis

The Big Idea of Genesis is simple. It's about the dogged determination of a Good God who not only created, but after his creation rebelled against Him, moved heaven and earth to redeem his creation. God is the central character of Genesis, but that doesn't mean that humans don't have a role. In fact, most of Genesis (especially after chapter 11) reads like a soapie as the family that God chose to deal graciously with – the family of Abraham – struggle with the enormity of what God has promised to do through them.

In Genesis, we find that the theme of salvation and judgment run right through the book. Salvation and judgment are two sides of the same coin – in God's dealings with his wayward creation, God is just and holy to judge, but in His judgment God also graciously chooses to save some. His sovereignty and Holiness are also there, but mysteriously wrapped up in the dealings of sinful human beings. A good example (though not covered in these studies) is Genesis chapter 38 where God brought forth a line of descendants from Judah through the most despicable of circumstances. Such is God's plan that Jesus' genealogy in Matthew chapter 1 openly refers to Tamar from that incident! Indeed, God's sovereignty triumphs over sin in the story of Joseph, but let's not get ahead of ourselves...

The aim of this term of studies then, is not just to get acquainted with the stories of Genesis, many of which may be familiar, but rather to learn to read Genesis with an eye on the God's unfolding plan of salvation – in which God graciously deals with creation through words and promises, to which He demonstrates His love, faithfulness, and power in the way He ultimately saves despite sin.

I trust that you'll find these studies helpful in exploring the book of Genesis and reflecting on how every part of scripture points to Jesus, and every promises God makes finds a 'yes' in Christ.

Weber

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Genesis 1-2

STUDY ONE



Key verse: Revelation 4:11 – ‘You are worthy our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.’



Big Idea: In the beginning, God was powerful, purposeful and personal in creating all things.

KICK OFF

What common ideas are out there about the origins of the universe? Logically, how should those views impact the way we live?

STUDY

Read Gen 1:1-2:3.

1. According to v.2, what was the world like before God’s acts of creation?

(More specifically, the earth was said to be F _____ and V _____ - what might this mean, and how might it connect to the following passage?)

2. Fill in the table below with regard to what happened on the 6 days:

Day 1	Day 4
Day 2	Day 5
Day 3	Day 6
Summary of the first 3 days (cf. 1:2)	Summary of the second 3 days (cf. 1:2)

What’s the connection across the two columns (i.e. day 1 & 4, 2 & 5, 3 & 6)?

3. What impression of God does this account of Genesis leave us? (Think about *how* he created etc.)

4. What appears to be the highlight of Genesis 1:1-2:3? What part of creation does this story appear to dwell on the longest?

5. What might it mean for humans to be made in God's image? Put it together with Col 1:15, 3:8-10; Rom 8:29.

Read Genesis 2:4-25

6. What impression of God's relationship with humans does Genesis 2 leave us?

THINK AND APPLY

There are often misconceptions regarding God, that He is far away, that He might have made the world like a beautiful pocket watch but then left us to our own devices, that He is almighty and glorious but not necessarily that interested in the affairs of our world. Discuss this in view of Genesis 1-2 as well what you know from the rest of the Bible. (If you have time, look up John 1:1-18)

- How are you going with:
 - 1) Trusting the God who created all things for your daily needs?
 - 2) Trusting the God who created purposefully that He has a plan for the world?
 - 3) Trusting the God who created us lovingly that He loves you?

PRAYER

Who can you pray for and what can you pray about arising from this study?



**For next week
Read
Gen 3-4**

Genesis 3-4



Key verse: Rom 3:24-25 – ‘for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

STUDY TWO



Big Idea: Sin came into the Garden

KICK OFF

Why do you think you sin? Where do you think you go wrong?

STUDY

Read 3:1-7.

1. How does the serpent tempt Adam and Eve?
2. Instead of relying on God’s good word, what does Eve do?

Read Gen 3:8-24

3. What are the consequences of the fall?

Adam & Eve’s action/reactions (v.7-13)	God’s judgment on the serpent (v.14-15)
God’s judgment on the woman (v.16)	God’s judgment on the Man (v.17-20)

4. What do you notice about the order in which God addresses the characters (v.9-13)? What implications might this have on the order God set up in creation?

Read Gen 4

5. How does the next chapter (Gen 4) see these awful consequences of sin spread?

THINK AND APPLY

God's good word is what the first man and woman deny in the original sin. They deny His good order, they deny His good word, and ultimately, they fail to trust Him as their good creator. This is tragically replayed over and over again in history and must be regarded as the root of all problems facing us.

- How does Jesus answer this problem of sin in your life? What will you say to someone who IS convinced that there's a deep seated problem with humanity but can't see the solution?
- One argument bought by people is that God is a kill-joy God who loves to heap rule upon rule on people. Against this is the Bible's position that slavery to God is perfect freedom (James 1:25)... how does our study help us to explain this?

PRAYER

What can you pray about arising from this study?



For next week
Read
Gen 5-11

Genesis 5-11

STUDY THREE



Big Idea: God will not tolerate human wickedness forever. If we understand how we've treated God and the reality of God's holiness, then we must expect judgement to take place. But even in judgment, God's grace wins!

KICK OFF

How do you feel about a God who judges? Is it something you find easy to talk about with friends and family?

STUDY

Have someone recap briefly what's happened so far in Genesis, then pray and read the passage.

Read Gen 6:5-9:17

1. ACTIVITY – Have one reader a chapter, and one drawer to draw what happens in the chapter on pieces of paper. Discuss the drawings and the story, before going on to the questions below.
2. According to God, what are people like? [see 6:5-6]
3. How would you describe the God of these chapters?
4. Is there anything in these chapters that reminds you of the creation story? (Use the hints below only after you've had a go!)¹ What is God doing? (see also 8:17; 9:1, 7)
5. Why do you think God ends the flood? How has God been gracious?
6. What sort of expectations might be on Noah from this point on? (see Gen 3:15, 5:29)

Read Gen 9:18-29

7. How does Noah fare as the beginning of a new humanity? Is Noah's fate (9:29) any different to his ancestors in Gen 5?

¹ waters everywhere (1:1, 6; 7:11), 'various kinds' (1:11 etc.; 7:14), 'God saw' and 'God said' (1:3-5 etc.; 6:5-7), 'be fruitful' (1:28; 8:15-17, 9:1-2, 7)

THINK, SHARE AND APPLY

God's judgment is terrible. But God's salvation is even greater. Although Noah was the head of a long line of failed candidates to save humanity from the effects of sin, someone did come along years later who took upon Himself the terrible judgment of God. It is only through Jesus' death we can be washed from our sins, and it is only through Jesus' RESURRECTION that new life without sin for all who believe is guaranteed, so that we can escape sin and the terrible judgment of hell. (2 Peter 3)

- How might good news of Jesus 're-calibrate' our hope for the future?

- How might that good news 're-calibrate' our priorities:
 - For ourselves?
 - For our family?
 - For our non-Christian friends?

- How might the idea of 'God's judgment' impact the way you share the gospel with others?

PRAYER

What can you pray about arising from this study?



For next week
Read
Gen 12-15

Genesis 12-15



Key verse: Genesis 15:6

STUDY FOUR



Big Idea: God deals with humanity through His words to us, in the shape of promises. This calls for us to trust Him in them and to live accordingly.

Kick Off

What things in our world (outside of religions and Christianity) do people put their faith in? How can you tell what they are? Share some things that people you know (or even yourself!) trust in.

STUDY

Read Gen 11:27-12:9.

1. What promises does God make to Abram? How would it have sounded to him?
2. How does Abram respond?

Divide into groups and read Gen 12:10-20 & Gen 20; 13:1-18; 14:1-24

3. What challenges do they present to God's promises and how does Abram respond in each episode?
4. What Abram's example tell us about what it's like to trust in God's promises?

Read Gen 15

5. How does God respond to Abram's chequered history of trusting Him? What does that tell us about God?
6. From your general bible knowledge, how do God's promises to Abram work out in the story of the OT? (You'll see in the table the promises form the Anacronym LOB'N – for memory just think of the Oz Tennis Open!)

Promise	Fulfilment (partial or otherwise) in OT
Land (15:18-21)	
Offspring	
Blessings	
Name	

7. Are there any details in Gen 15 that are interesting or puzzling? Share and discuss

THINK AND APPLY

- If the God of the Bible is a God who makes promises, then what should the right response be to Him?
(see Heb 11:8-16)
- What makes it hard to trust God and his promises?

PRAYER

What can you pray about arising from this study?

(Pray too for the preaching of this message of faith as a right that we'll have hearts that trust God at His word.)



**For next week
Read
Gen 16-22**

Growth Group Extra –



Hopefully Genesis has been a riveting read for you as you've worked through it in your Growth Groups. As we go along, we can't help but notice the uncomfortable amount of deception that goes on in it... Grant Thorp traces a thread in Genesis that might just unravel the mysteries of the book of Genesis... Source: Perspective Vo1 No3 ©Perspective 1999

IT'S THE FOURTH cold grey rainy day in a row. My bored, not quite two year old, reaches for his trusty chair and climbs up to adjust the settings on the video. I give the stern parental "Get down!" He stares back knowingly. Wide blue eyes. Half smile. Almost audibly he thinks, "He doesn't really mean it,...did he really say..." In the end it takes a firm parental hand to clear away this misconception. I don't want him to be deceived.

This familiar standoff is as old as parenthood. In fact, it goes back to the original place, when the propagator of evil put a similar argument to some thoughtful but gullible children of God.

Deception is a key idea to unravelling the rich complexities of Genesis. It is an idea that appears frequently, beginning with the garden and continuing through every major character to the story of Joseph. It exposes the guts of sin and the character of God.

One of the problems I have when I come to preach on one of the large OT books is how to get a handle on it. I suspect I'm not alone. The sheer amount of material scares me off, often before I've begun. But if I can find an entryway into it, I can cope. Is 'deception' such an entryway into Genesis? The question is almost shocking. "Genesis is about creation" "It's about beginnings." At least that's what I was told when I asked some friends what it was about. But is that what it's about? Have we been so sidetracked by the creation/evolution

debate that we have failed to see other major themes that provide a way into the whole book and not just a part of it?

Genesis begins by picturing an idyllic scene—the garden of Eden. Cool winding streams, shady trees, succulent fruit are the order of the day. There are no diseases, no taxes, no commands. Except one. "The fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden you must not eat for on the day you eat of it you will die." Into this idyllic setting slides the serpent, with his familiar argument: "Did God really say "You must not eat from any tree in the garden?"; "You will not surely die." Subtly and deceptively he paints himself as an angel of light, and God as the deceiving villain. He bites them and the venom spreads.

From this point on Genesis reads like a Who's Who of the world's great deceivers. Virtually every character is in on the act, vying with the others to see who is best. Adam and Eve begin in grand style by trying to deceive God himself. Abraham, the man whom God calls to bring blessing to the world, turns out to be a deceiver. In order to save his own neck he passes his wife off as his sister. His son Isaac does the same with his wife. The family trait continues in Isaac's son Jacob. With the help of his mother he pulled the goatskin over his father's eyes and obtained the blessing which was rightfully his brothers. For his trouble, Jacob is in turn deceived by his father-in-law. Laban marries his short sighted

daughter off to Jacob and makes him work another seven years for Rachel. He is then done over again by his children who deceive him into thinking his favourite son, Joseph, is dead. Joseph completes the circle by deceiving his brothers about his identity. It's hard to imagine a more distinguished group of liars. You wouldn't buy a used car from any of them.

Deception features in practically every major character and incident in the book. We must conclude that it's an important theme. But what theological mileage can be gained from that conclusion? It seems evident that creation is a theological rocket with lots of sparkle, but isn't deception by comparison a lame duck?

It depends if you consider the nature of sin, God's control and grace to be lame duck ideas or not?

All of these ideas are tied to the theme of deception.

Every day we are surrounded by sin, but what is it like? Essentially sin is deception. Genesis clarifies that for us in the seduction of Eve and the portrayal of the other characters in the book. Our own experiences bear it out. All sin involves some level of compromise with the truth, from obvious lies to the subtle deception of pride, seeing ourselves as better or more important than we are. We are enticed by something that appears to be what in reality it is not.

What about God's control? Through their deceit the characters in Genesis try to carve out a future apart from the promises of God. Abraham, to save his own neck, passes off Sarah as his sister. In doing so he endangers God's promises. Despite that threat, God proves himself to be powerful to bring truth and fulfilment out of the deceptive situation. God is truth and through the truth God shows himself to be in control. God's truth-is more powerful than man's lies.

Not only does deception allow us to see the nature of sin and of God's control, it also sheds light on the grace of God. Repeatedly Genesis illustrates that you don't have to be good for God to back you. All of Abraham's descendants are shifty, but God still chooses them, works with them and redeems them out of their deception. He even chose Jacob over his brother Esau, despite the fact that Jacob's

name meant "he grasps the heel" or figuratively "he deceives." God eventually renamed him "Israel" meaning "he struggles with God." The true Israelite, the true child of God, has of course been redeemed from deception. Like Nathaniel whom Jesus described as "a true Israelite in whom there is no guile," the true follower of Christ will be a person who does not practise deceit.

Deception is a key idea in Genesis. As a theme it provides a skeleton for the book. It shows us the core of sin which is untruth, and the character of God which is grace and truth. God shows himself to be the God who consistently keeps his promises, rescuing his people from the destructiveness of their own deceptions by the power of his truth.

At the time of writing, Grant Thorp was the minister of Wee Waa Presbyterian Church.



Genesis 16-22

STUDY FIVE



Big Idea: Despite the failure of God's people to trust in His promises, God is willing and able to remain faithful to them.

Kick Off

Have you ever been let down by someone on a significant promise? How did it feel? Under what circumstances would it have been ok to be let down?

Abram and Sarai have been given great promises, the most improbable of which is having children in their 70s & 80s, which was still the case by the beginning of our passages (16:1). Briefly review the promises made by God to Abram: L ____ O ____ B ____ (12:1-3)

STUDY

Read Gen 16.

1. Retell the story in your group. How does Sarai's plan mesh with God's? Could you say Sarai is taking matters into her own hands?
2. In what light are the various actor cast? (Think Sarai, Abram, Hagar, God)
3. What does this match up with what we've seen so far of Abram? (e.g. Gen 12:12-20) Is he a man of faith or not? (Look ahead to Gen 25:21 – how does the eventual son of promise Isaac act in a similar situation?)

Application: What are you like as a 'man or woman of faith' in comparison? Is it hard for you to trust God sometimes? Why?

Take note that the events in Gen 16 occurred when Abram was 86 years old, that according to 17:1, it was a further 13 years before God spoke to him again.

Read Gen 17:1-8

4. Has God's plans or promises changed? (How does Abraham respond this time in v.23)

Read Gen 18:1-15

5. The 'over-the-top' reception of the strangers turn into an encounter with God in which God (through an angel) promises the imminent conception and birth of a son by Sarah.

- Does Sarah find it easier to trust God now that there is a timeframe?

- How does Abraham fare (have a quick glance at Gen 20)?

6. Put together a picture of Abraham & Sarah's faith from what we've read. Is this a picture of what it's like to trust God in hard times?

7. What does Hebrews 11:11-12 say about this time in their lives?

Read Gen 21:1-8

Despite the fragile, inconsistent and sometimes downright broken nature of their faith in God, Abraham and Sarah's faith is vindicated by God's own faithfulness in fulfilling His promises. The all too human story of the family of Abraham has God as the hero who is stubbornly determined to bring blessing and reverse the curse of the fall through Abraham's descendants. In the same vein, we trust in the finished work of Jesus on the cross, and long for the day when He returns, that He will vindicate our trust in Him by declaring us righteous in Him. This is all in spite of how we waver and fail in our faith.

THINK, SHARE AND APPLY

- Can the 'strength' of our faith, or the uprightness of our life (commendable as it is), become a substitute saviour for us?

- If genuine faith (like that of Abraham and Sarah) can look weak and inconsistent at times, how should we react to those sorts of struggles we see in:
 - Us?

 - Other Christians?

 - New Christians?

PRAYER

What can you pray about arising from this study?



**For next week
Read
Gen 23-28**

Genesis 25-28

STUDY SIX



Big Idea: God graciously chooses undeserving people to be gracious to.

Kick Off

If you were God, what sort of people would you choose to save? Why?

Abraham's son Isaac, the son of promise has twin sons – this section of Genesis is the story of Isaac's family and it shows just how UNLIKE us God is when it comes to choosing people!

Read Gen 25:18-34

1. How would you describe the circumstances of the twin's birth? What do you think it foreshadows?
2. What is the respective attitudes of Esau and Jacob to their inheritance? (*Traditionally, the eldest – Esau gets a double portion, i.e. two thirds of the estate, plus the mantle of 'patriarch' with its associated relationships and covenants with others outside the family – e.g. with God and allies*)

Read Gen 26:1-24 (optional)

3. How would you describe Isaac's character in vv.1-11
4. In contrast, how has God dealt with Isaac in relation to promises made to Abraham?

Read Gen 27:1-45

5. Summarise what happened, then compare and contrast the character of the following:

Isaac	Rebekah	Esau	Jacob

6. How does this episode reflect on the nature of human relationships post-fall? Where are the problems?

7. What is God's verdict on this? (hint – for the full picture, do the next study to see how Jacob's life pans out!)
How deserving is Jacob of God's favour?

The doctrine of election and predestination has always been tough for Christians to wrap our heads around. However, Jacob's story is a disarmingly simple story of someone who is completely undeserving of God's grace, yet tenaciously clinging on to it at the same time. It's a good reminder to us that God is in control, that there is NO ONE righteous (Rom 3:10-12) but in His mercy He has saved some, like Jacob, and that the appropriate response is thanks and clinging on to the promise of salvation tenaciously. For further reflections, see Romans 9.

THINK AND APPLY

To what extent is Jacob or any Christian deserving of salvation from God? How does that make you feel about God?

What lessons about family dynamics can we learn from this sad and sorry tale? (If you are preparing before GG, try reading Gen 29:31-30:24 to add to your thoughts)

PRAYER

What can you pray about arising from this study?



**For next week
Read
Gen 37-50**

Genesis 28-35

STUDY SEVEN (For personal study)

STUDY

Day 1 – Read Gen 27:41-35:29

Make a Summary of what happened in each chapter.

27:	32:
28:	33:
29:	34:
30:	35:
31:	

Day 2 – Read Gen 28-30

Under what circumstances has Jacob come to Laban? How is he treated by Laban?

How has God treated Jacob? For what reason does He do so?

How does Jacob's family affairs work out in contrast to his own family of origin?

What can we take away from this as Christians?

Day 3 – Read Gen 31-33

What do you make of Jacob's flight from Laban? What are the interests of Jacob? What are those of Laban?

What about those of Rachel and Leah?

On whose 'side' is God, if any?

In Chapters 32-33, the reunion of Jacob and Esau are sandwiched by Jacob's encounter with God. Why do you think this might be?

How does Jacob feel about the prospect of being reunited with his twin? What actually happens?

Is Jacob a changed man after his exile from home, his encounters with God, his dealings with Laban? What evidence is there?

Day 4 – Read Gen 34-35

For all that Jacob has gone through, how does he turn out as a patriarch of the family of God? (What is his parenting style? What are his sons like?)

What happens at Bethel? What does God promise Jacob?

This section of Genesis under the title of 'This is the account of Isaac' (ch.25-36) finishes here. In one sense it's a tale of woe and failure, but in another it's a tale of God's tenacity to bless. But in case we think this is as bad as it gets, the family dysfunction is about to get worse.

Genesis 37, 39-50

STUDY EIGHT*



Big Idea: Sin repeatedly perverts and distorts the character of God’s creatures, at the head of which is man. Yet God’s plans never fails despite sin.

*Due to the size of the passage being covered (after all, there was enough material here for Andrew Lloyd Webber to make a musical out of it!), take your time to split the passages up between groups or individuals to read and report back with a summary of the chapter(s) they covered. Needless to say, it is VERY helpful to have read these many chapters between coming to GG.

STUDY

Summarise the storyline below, along with an impression of what you think of the characters involved.

37:	44:
39:	45:
40:	46:
41:	47:

42:	48:
43:	49:29-50:25

1. How would you describe Joseph's character throughout the story?
2. How would you describe God's involvement throughout the story?

Read Gen 50:15-21.

3. What is Joseph's brothers' concern? How does Joseph's reply show his understanding of what God is like?

Read Acts 2:22-36.

4. What parallels can we find between God's actions in Joseph's life and that of Jesus'?

THINK, SHARE AND APPLY

What comfort can we gain in the way God works even through the plans of sinful men?

What does God's sovereign goodness mean for you in the specific contexts of

- a) Home

b) Work

c) Church

REFLECTIONS FROM GENESIS

Take a moment to share with others one thing you've learnt from the book of Genesis and how it applies to your life of following Jesus.

PRAYER

What can you pray about arising from this study?

Prayer notes:



The Heavens declare the glory of God;
The skies proclaim the work of His hands

Psalm 19:1 - a psalm reflecting on Genesis

Acacia Ridge Presbyterian Church
Growth Groups Studies
Term 3 2013

Please direct any feedback on the material to weber@arpc.org.au