A close-up, high-contrast photograph of an elderly man's face, likely Abraham, with a thick, grey beard and mustache. His right eye is replaced by a glowing, multi-colored blue and purple lens. The background is dark and textured, resembling a night sky or a rough surface.

P R O M I S E

— G E N E S I S 1 2 - 2 5 —

G O D ' S G R A C I O U S I N I T I A T I V E
I N T H E L I F E & T I M E S O F A B R A H A M

SERIES BREAKDOWN

PREACHED	PASSAGE	STUDY
19 July	Gen 12	#1 God's Call
26 July	Gen 13-14	#2 Kings & Nations
2 Aug	Gen 15	#3 God's Promise
9 Aug	Gen 16	#4 Sarai's Solution
16 Aug	Gen 17	#5 People of the Promise
23 Aug	Gen 18-19	#6 Judgement & Mercy
30 Aug	Gen 20	#7 Faltering Faith
6 Sept	Gen 21	#8 God's Provision
13 Sept	Gen 22	#9 Obedient Faith
20 Sept	Gen 24	#10 God's Kindness
27 Sept	Gen 23; 25:1-11	#11 Still Longing

INTRODUCTION

Our God is a God of gracious initiative. If it was any other way, we would still be dead in our sins. Despite humanity's propensity to push God away, the Bible testifies to God's passionate pursuit of us as he works to bring humanity back into His blessing – the blessing which Adam and Eve so tragically forfeited in the garden.

The first seeds of God's cosmic plan of redemption are sown here in these chapters of Genesis as God plucks a man out of obscurity and issues him with a covenant promise to restore God's blessing to the nations through his family.

In Abraham we have a very rugged portrait of someone caught up in God's gracious plans. He is an example of how God desires us to respond to his great promises – with faith, “Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” (Genesis 15:6) Yet Abraham's faith also faltered as he lived in the gap between promise and reality, he readily struggled to reconcile God's promises with the impossibility of his personal circumstances.

This gap between promise and reality is a tension that we also live in. We know our eternal inheritance, we know God's goodness and his plan of salvation, but we live through many pains, griefs and longings that threaten our confidence in God.

Abraham's life thus serves as an example for us as we live in the gap between promise and reality. His failings a warning and his triumphs a commendation of continued confidence in God, even until our final breath. As Hebrews 11:3 says of Abraham and other such figures in Genesis, “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.” (Hebrews 11:13).

Like Abraham, God desires us to keep trusting Him (sometimes seemingly against all the odds) as we long for our heavenly home.

Yet if Abraham is only an example, he would not be much an encouragement for us who fall way short of his standard. **Abraham is much more than an example**, his life and the promises he received, point forward to the culmination of God's plans of redemption - redemption which was accomplished through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, the risen Lord Jesus led a Bible Study for the disciples on how the whole Old Testament foreshadowed his passion (Luke 24:25-27). When he did so, it's highly likely he covered these chapters! As we move through the term ahead of us, let's scour these chapters like explorers looking for bush tracks and fire trails (no matter how seemingly obscure the location) that terminate upon the priceless treasure of Christ.

For Jesus has succeeded where we (and Abraham!) have failed. Jesus did what we could not. He lived a perfect life of faithful obedience and so took the curse of our sin upon the cross so that God's blessing might be restored to us for all eternity.

THE BOOK OF GENESIS¹

OVERVIEW

The title Genesis means ‘origins.’ This is an apt description, for the book covers the origins of God’s creation, humanity’s fall into sin, and God’s plan to redeem humanity from our sin.

Though viewed by modern readers as one distinct book, it actually forms one literary unit with the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible). As such it is effectively ‘prequel to the main story of the Pentateuch, giving the background to the events that led up to Israel’s dramatic deliverance.’²

GENRE & HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Genesis is best described as *theological history* in that it ‘focuses on God’s relationship with his human creatures and eventually with Abraham and his descendants.’³ The book is thus not primarily concerned with providing a scientific account nor precise historical dating. With this in mind, perhaps ‘at best we can say that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived sometime around the first quarter of the second millennium BC.’⁴

It is also worth noting that there is a marked shift in the narrative as Genesis moves into chapter 12. Where previously the narrator uses figurative language and a wide angle lens to capture large swathes of history, here the narrative time slows right down to concentrate on the lives of Abraham and his descendants. ‘The author thus signals an interest to communicate actual events in a more precise manner as the narrative turns to events which form the foundation for Israel.’⁵ We therefore read Genesis 12-25 in a different manner than we do to chapters 1-11.

AUTHORSHIP

The Pentateuch has traditionally been ascribed to Moses. Within the Pentateuch Moses is described as writing things down (Exo 17:14; Num 33:2; Deut 31:24). Furthermore, the Old Testament refers to the Pentateuch as the book of Moses (Josh 1:7-8; 2 Chron 25:4; Neh 13:1 etc). Jesus does likewise (Matt 19:7; Mk 7:10; Jn 1:17).

Objections to Mosaic authorship have been raised on the basis that there are verses which clearly pre-date Moses (Gen 1-11) and post-date him (Gen 11:28, 31; 14:14; Deut 34; Num 12:4). Yet given the Biblical data already mentioned, it’s hard to deny that Moses was integral to the book and likely marshalled oral sources in the composition of Genesis. His writing was then probably supplemented by the later additions of inspired editors as the book reached its final form as known and affirmed by (and in the time of) Jesus.

¹ A summary of the excellent introduction provided in Tremper Longman III, *The Story of God Bible Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

² Ibid., 1.

³ Ibid., 7.

⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁵ Ibid., 8.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROMISE

CREATION

Genesis 1-2. God is the all-powerful creator of the heavens and earth. Distinct from the rest of creation, he made humanity in his image and they enjoy his blessing –

*God **bles**sed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” (Gen 1:22)*

FALL

Genesis 3-11. Enticed and enlisted into the serpent’s rebellion, this blessing is quickly forfeited by Adam and Eve who disobey God’s command and take from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their act is indicative of the sinful human bent to assert ourselves as moral arbiters in place of God.

In judgement, Adam and Eve are cast out of the garden. No longer do they enjoy God’s **bles**sing and presence. Instead they, and the world in which they live, are placed under a curse.

From Genesis 4, we see humanity spiral downward in sin. The events of Cain, Noah and Babel follow a similar pattern: human sin, God’s judgement announced then executed. Yet also in each instance, God gives a token of grace to indicate that he has not given up on humanity.⁶

REDEMPTION

Genesis 12 onwards. In Genesis 3:15 God gives a hint of the redemption he will bring about in order to restore humanity to his **bles**sing – Adam’s seed will crush the evil serpent, yet this crushing will come at a cost, as the serpent will also strike the heel of Adam’s seed.

God’s plan of redemption takes firmer shape from the end of Genesis 11 when we are introduced to Abram son of Terah from the land of Ur. Though humanity sought to make a name for itself at Babel, God promises to make a name for Abram and to **bles**s the whole earth through him (Gen 12:1-3). It will be through Abraham’s line that God’s **bles**sing will be restored to humanity. The rest of Genesis thus traces Abraham’s line through to Joseph until we meet the nation of Israel in Egypt whom God rescues in keeping with his covenant promises.

It is from this nation that Jesus, the serpent crusher, eventually comes to redeem humanity and restore us to God’s **bles**sing.

CONSUMMATION

Revelation. This **bles**sing will be consummated when humanity is finally brought back into God’s presence – not back to the Garden of Eden, but forward to the city of Zion, complete with not one tree, but two trees of life and in the immediate presence and glory of God.

⁶ Tremper Longman III, *The Story of God Bible Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 2.

HOW TO USE THE STUDY GUIDES

OVERVIEW

An overview has been provided for each study to help orientate us to the text and understand its meaning. This overview is best read after you've read the passage and thought through the questions – for in a few instances the overview may cover some of the questions and short-circuit your own discovery process.

PROMISE & FULFILMENT

Leaning in to Jesus' statements that the whole of the Old Testament converges upon him (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47), we'll spend some time each week considering how various aspects of Genesis 12-25 foreshadow or predict the sufferings and glory of Christ.

GETTING STARTED

If group members contribute towards the beginning of a session, it increases the likelihood that they'll continue to participate throughout the rest of the time together.

Accordingly the Getting Started questions are designed to do just this – to get everyone talking on a subject matter that dovetails with the week's study. It's a time for sharing stories and airing opinions without arriving at any definitive conclusions (that will come when we let the Bible do the talking!). This will likely be a great time for group members to get to know each other better too.

INTO THE TEXT

Before moving into reading and discussing the Bible text, invite some(one) to pray that your time together in God's Word would be rich and transformative. The 'Into the Text' questions are primarily focussed on understanding the content of the passage – they will often do so with reference to the context of the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew's gospel, as well as the wider Scriptures.

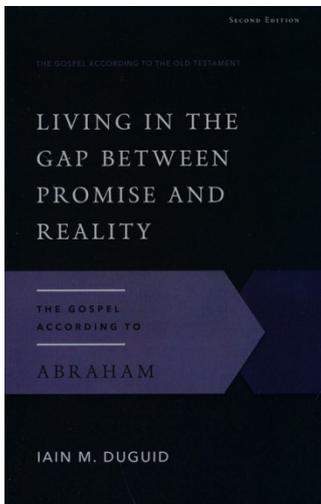
TAKE AWAY

This part of the study is absolutely crucial. We cannot afford to be mere hearers of the Word and not doers of the Word. Ensure that adequate time is given to *prayerfully* considering the impact that God's Word should have on our lives.

This section is particularly crucial to our Bible Study groups because in a smaller setting, God's Word will be able to be applied in a much more targeted and group-specific manner than is possible from the pulpit. Accordingly, Group leaders should feel free to tailor the Takeaway questions to suit their group and should consider having the study in the week following the sermon so as to focus on application.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The most and frequently cited commentaries in the study notes are as follows –



Living in the Gap Between Promise & Reality: The Gospel According to Abraham

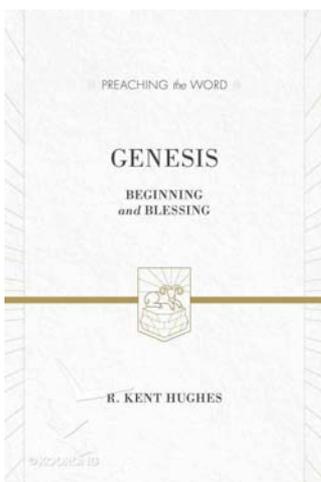
Author: Iain M. Duguid

Year: 2015 (Second Ed)

Series: The Gospel According to the Old Testament

Pages: 208

Comment: Accessible and beautifully demonstrates how the life and times of Abraham foreshadow Jesus.



Genesis: Beginning and Blessing

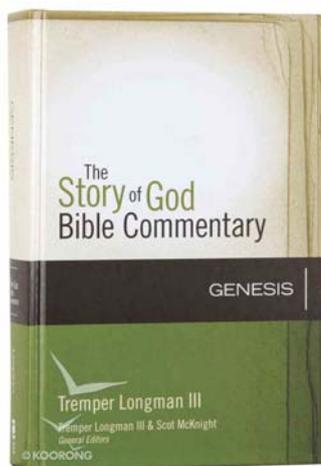
Author: R. Kent Hughes

Year: 2004

Series: Preach the Word

Pages: 704

Comment: Brilliant series of commentaries, with a plenty of helpful life application from a veteran pastor.



Genesis

Author: Tremper Longman III

Year: 2016

Series: The Story of God Bible Commentary

Pages: 624

Comment: Slightly more Academic but still accessible. Interacts with the historical context of the Ancient Near East.

The Tyndale Commentary by Derek Kidner as well as the NIV Application Commentary by John Walton are also helpful and insightful.