



A word on the Word

A monthly series on the Bible by Carrie Boren, Missioner for Evangelism

The stories of Genesis — Covenants and the establishment of God's people

The Genesis story is one of beginnings — the beginning of the world, the beginning of man made in God's image and God's purpose for humanity, the beginning of human rebellion, the beginning of God's judgment of man, the beginning of God's rescue. Genesis marks the commencement of God's plan to save humanity from sin and draw all people to a relationship with Himself.

One way of looking at the salvation story captured in the Bible is to see it as a series of covenants between God and humanity. In the Old Testament, a covenant depicts a lasting bond of sacred kinship. Much more than a temporary contract, a covenant establishes a way for God to bring sinful human beings into His covenant family forever.

The first covenant described in Gen. 2:15-17 is the one God made with Adam, which means "mankind" in Hebrew. All other covenants spring from this covenant.

Initially, God created human beings who were in perfect unity with Him. Man and woman quickly broke this union when they decided to go their own way, denying God's law. Sin, evil, and death immediately began to contaminate the world. God banished Adam and Eve from the garden of paradise, and soon after their son, Cain, killed his brother, Abel, out of envy. The early stories in Genesis illustrate the ravages of sin on the world. Evil generation after generation infected Cain's line, reaching its pinnacle in Lamech. Each ensuing generation sought personal glory and continually defied God. Lamech engaged in polygamy and treated human beings like pawns for his own use.

Meanwhile, Adam and Eve had another son named Seth who established a righteous line. During the time of Enosh, Seth's son, the author of Genesis states, "At that time men began to call upon the name of the Lord" (Gen. 4:26). So, two lines progress throughout Genesis — Seth's line, which worshipped God, seeking to bring Him glory, and Cain's line, which sought human glory at all costs. Soon, however, those in Seth's line became tainted by not only the original sin of their ancestors, Adam and Eve, but by intermarrying with Cain's line, the Cainites. Genesis 6 reads, "When men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair and they took wives such of them as they chose." The "daughters of men"

(*i.e.*, the descendants of Cain) and the "sons of God" (*i.e.*, the descendants of Seth) commingled, often through polygamous relationships, and sin multiplied. As a result, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart" (Gen. 6:5-6). This provoked God to send a flood to destroy ruinous, sin-polluted humanity. Yet, God's love and mercy moved Him to save His Creation.

The second covenant God established was with Noah. God promised to save Noah's family and representatives of every beast and bird as the beginning of a new creation. God said to Noah, "I will recall my covenant I have made between me and you and living beings, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all mortal beings" (Gen. 9:15). Noah began to rebuild society through the birth of his three sons, Japheth, Ham, and Shem.

Even though God flooded the world to remove violence, the flood did not wash away sin. As the family rebuilt, sin infected it. Ham, Noah's son, found Noah drunk and mocked his father. As a result, Noah cursed Ham and his descendants, the Canaanites. Noah blessed Shem's family from whose genealogical line came the People of God, the future Israelites. The arrogance of Ham's children continued through generations to the building of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). They said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky and so make a name for ourselves, otherwise we shall be scattered all over the earth" (Gen. 11:4). In judgment, God scattered the people and gave them different languages.

From Shem's line came Abram with whom God established a third covenant — to call a people to represent Him and His laws to the world. The Lord said to Abram (who became Abraham, which means "Father of a Multitude"), "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 curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:1-3). God chose to reveal Himself to the world through the Jewish people. He promised them land (Canaan), a kingship, and worldwide blessing (Gen. 17:1-8).

Civilization continued to develop in both fruitful and destructive ways. God executed His wrath against the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah for their sexual immorality. Lot's daughters tricked him into fathering their children, which led to more nations that would attempt to destroy Israel — the Ammonites and Moabites. Meanwhile, Abraham fathered two sons — Isaac, who was born to Sarah, Abraham's wife, and Ishmael who was born to Hagar, Abraham's maidservant. Ishmael fathered the Arab people and Isaac was a patriarch of the Israelites. From Isaac to his sons, Jacob (later named Israel which means "wrestled with God") and Esau, to Jacob's twelve sons, including Joseph, the line of Abraham expanded to become the People of God.

Out of jealousy, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, and he ended up in Egypt. After years of service in Egypt, Joseph rose in prominence to become prime minister to the Egyptian Pharaoh. Joseph had predicted that seven years of famine would follow seven years of plenty. Therefore, Pharaoh put him in charge of storing grain during the years of plenty so that the nation would have food to eat during the famine. As a result, Egypt was the only region prepared with stocked grains for the worldwide hunger. Soon many of the Israelites came to Egypt to buy food from Pharaoh. They encountered their brother, Joseph, whom they sold into slavery, and they were afraid. Joseph however did not take revenge. He explained to his brothers that what they had meant for harm, God had meant for good — to save His people from famine. Soon Jacob and his entire family moved to Egypt and flourished. The book of Genesis ends with God's people in a foreign land.

Salvation history: Seven covenants

1st Covenant — God with Adam — relationship with all humanity.

2nd Covenant — God with Noah and his household after the flood.

3rd Covenant — God with Abraham and his tribe

4th Covenant — God with the whole nation of Israel through Moses.

5th Covenant — God with all nations through David and Solomon

6th Covenant — New Covenant with all humanity through Jesus Christ.

7th Covenant — End of time covenant with all humanity for an eternity.

[*Covenant Paradigm* by Dr. Scott Hahn]