

THE BOOK OF **BEGINNINGS**

Exploring Literary
Movements and Themes
in Genesis

A Study
Through
The
Book of

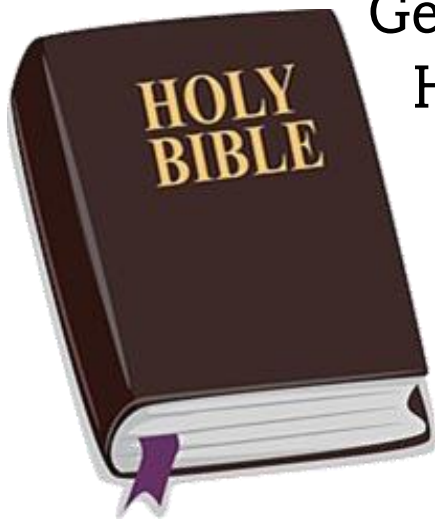
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WELCOME TO THE NEW
CHURCH FOR THE
Nations

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In the beginning...

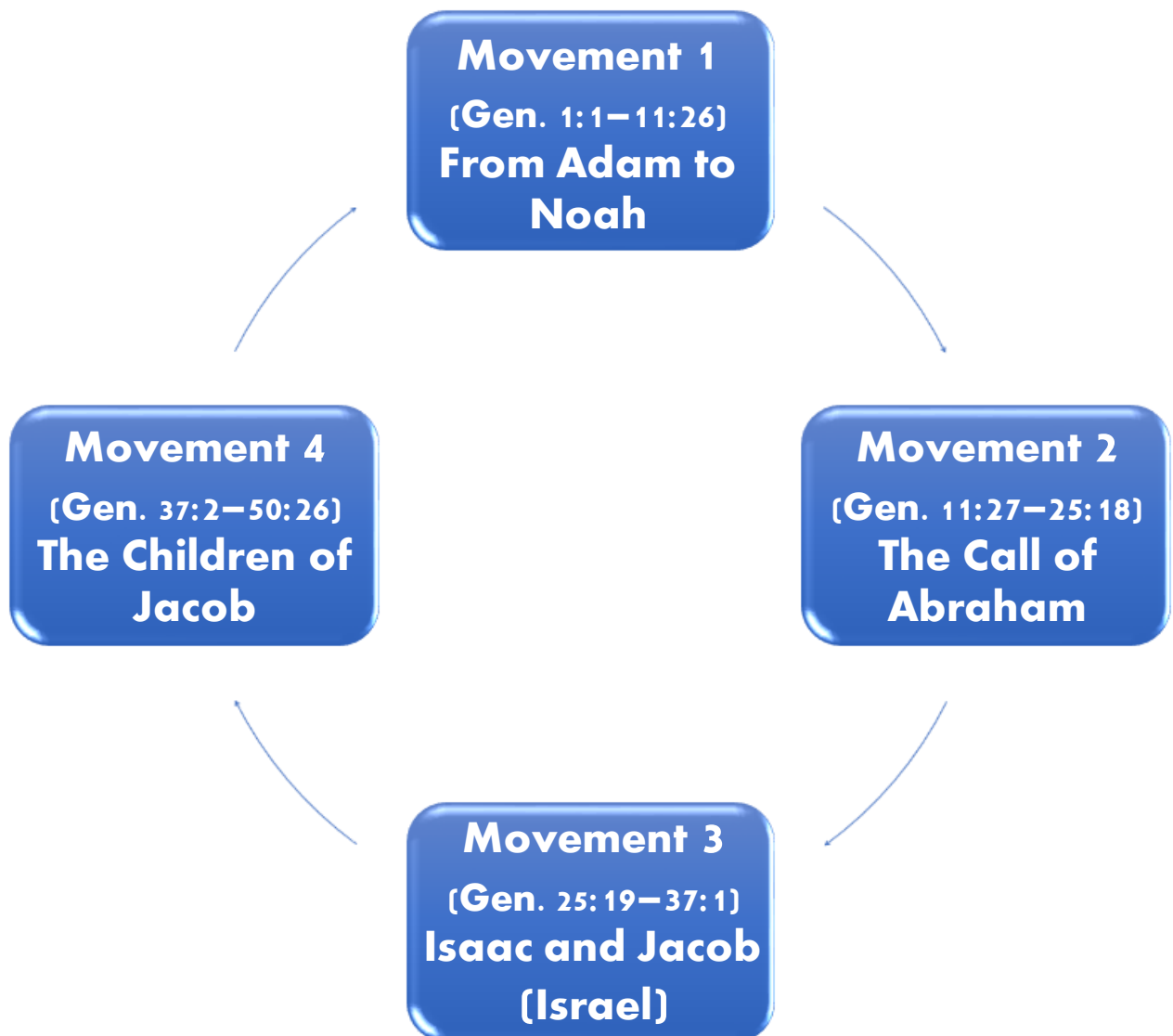
Genesis is a book about beginnings. In its opening chapter we see God creating an ordered environment (Days 1-3), filling it with inhabitants (Days 4-6), and then taking up control of the creation in His rest (Day 7).



Genesis talks about the beginning of the HEAVENS AND THE EARTH, LIGHT AND DARKNESS, VEGETATION, LIVING CREATURES, MAN AND HIS OFFSPRING, MARRIAGE, FAMILY, CIVILIZATION, SIN, AND EVEN THE FUTURE HOPE OF REDEMPTION AND ETERNAL LIFE.

Genesis also introduces us to the way that God initiates and maintains covenants with human beings, and the way in which He pledges His love and faithfulness to them, calling them to offer theirs to Him in return. Genesis also establishes atoning sacrifice as the substitution for life, and the significance of belief and trust in God as the medium of Christian faith, *cf.* Gen. 15:6.

The Four Major Literary Movements In Genesis



■ First Movement – Genesis 1:1–11:26

The first movement of Genesis begins with God creating beauty, order, and goodness out of disorder and darkness. He creates a world where life can flourish, as well as living beings to inhabit that world. By breathing His own life into them, God makes human beings (*adam* in Hebrew) in His image. The humans are then given a choice between trusting God or knowing good and evil for themselves. Ultimately, they rebel against God by heeding the deceptive voice of a mysterious serpent in the garden, and Chapters 3-11 detail the widening effects of this rebellion. Chapter 11 depicts the building of Babylon and a mysterious tower meant to rival the will and authority of God Himself. In response, God humbles mankind, and scatters them across the land.



■ Second Movement – Genesis 11:27–25:18

In the second movement of Genesis, we are introduced to Abraham, which shifts the focus from the scattered people of Babylon to Abraham and his family. This section details Abraham's human failures along with his obedient trust in God, who enters into a redemptive partnership (covenant) with Abraham and promises to bring universal blessing to the world through his family. The movement ends with Abraham's death, which shifts the focus of the next movement to Abraham's son Isaac, and Isaac's two sons, Esau and Jacob.



■ Third Movement – Genesis 25:19–37:1

The third movement of Genesis continues the biblical story with the birth of Isaac's twin sons, Esau and Jacob. The movement focuses on God's invitation to Abraham's descendants to steward His blessing for the rest of creation. But when his descendants fail to properly steward His blessing, they bring about the curse, which is the negative consequences that come about when we oppose God's will and blessing. Though God freely blesses Isaac's son Jacob from the time of his birth, Jacob fails to trust God, and lives as if His blessing depends on Jacob's own ability to take it. At a key point in the narrative, God wounds Jacob's hip during a mysterious struggle, but it is precisely this wound that helps Jacob finally receive God's blessing as a free gift, and not something he can acquire by force or cunning. And it is here that God renames Jacob, Israel, which implies *striving* and *reigning with God*.



■ Fourth Movement – Genesis 37:2–50:26

The pattern and imagery of exile fills the final movement of Genesis, which focuses on the story of Jacob's son Joseph, who is sold into slavery by his older brothers, and exiled to Egypt. But God remains with Joseph, even in Egypt, and elevates him to power and status. In the end, God uses Joseph to save countless lives, including those of the very brothers who betrayed him.

— Some of the Major Themes Found in Genesis —

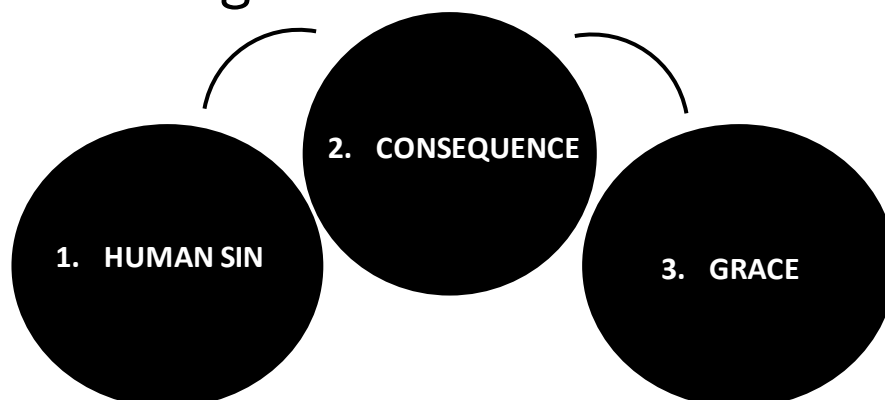
[1] Human beings are the divine image bearers of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-30; 2:15) The Hebrew word for “image” denotes a physical representation of something else. In Genesis this means that humans physically represent God in the material world.

[2] Human selfishness (“sin”) ultimately leads to the fracturing of man’s relationship with God, and the ruin of human relationships on all levels. Most of the stories in Genesis 3-11 explore the various sides of human sin, and its consequence.

[3] In these stories, God’s response to sin is twofold:

- I. He brings justice (consequences) on sin itself.
- II. But He also offers grace in the form of future blessing.

In Genesis, nearly every account of sin is met with an immediate consequence, along with an act of grace, which ensures future blessing.



[4] God responds to humanity's sin by choosing Abraham's family as the means of restoring divine blessing to the world. God's blessing to "all families of the earth" through Abraham provides the foundational storyline for the rest of the Bible.

[5] The drama of Genesis 12-50 consists of both the faith and failures of Abraham's family, and details how human selfishness and sin causes them to continually jeopardize God's promise and blessing.



ABRAHAM

ENDANGERS THE PROMISE OF A LARGE FAMILY BY GIVING AWAY HIS WIFE, TWICE!

GENESIS 12, 20

SARAH

TRIES TO FORCE GOD'S HAND TO GIVE THEM A CHILD BY HAVING ABRAHAM SLEEP WITH HAGAR

GENESIS 16, 21

ISAAC

GIVES AWAY HIS WIFE REBEKAH

GENESIS 26

JACOB

IS A THIEF AND A LIAR AND GAINS THE BLESSING BY STEALING

GENESIS 25, 27

JOSEPH'S BROTHERS

TRY TO KILL HIM

GENESIS 37

The Point

Even the family of Abraham is ensnared by the problem of sin. The divine promises given to them are only fulfilled through God's faithfulness, not theirs.

Another pattern that is established in Genesis and continued through the rest of the Bible is God's embrace of the lesser son, or people of low status. In Genesis, He frequently works through the people who are weak or marginalized.

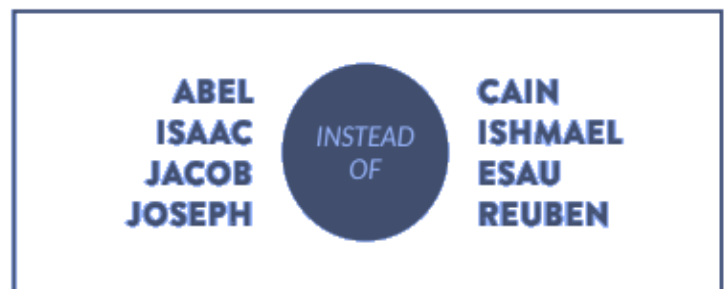
THE THEME OF THE LATER SON

Genesis frequently focuses on the life of a later son in preference to the firstborn: Seth over Cain, Shem over Japheth, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Judah and Joseph over their brothers, and Ephraim over Manasseh. This underscores the fact that the people of God are not the product of natural human developments, but are the result of God's sovereign and gracious intrusion in human history. He brings out of the fallen human race a new humanity consecrated to Himself, called and destined to be the people of His kingdom and the channel of His blessing to the whole earth.

Ref. Dobson, K (NIV Study Bible)

A

It is often not the firstborn sons that God uses as the vehicle of His promises, but rather the unexpected, or lesser children, which follow them.



B

God moves towards those who are rejected.

