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DISCIPLESHIP TRACK, YEAR 3
OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY
GENESIS - MALACHI

An Old Testament Survey
Presented to Fireside Reformed Baptist Church
in Elizabethtown, Kentucky

by
The Men of Fireside
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GENESIS 1-50

GENESIS: CREATION, FALL, AND REDEMPTION

“It’s not how you start; it’s how you finish.” You’ve heard that before, maybe at a sporting event when a team comes from behind to win a game in the final minutes. However, starts can be very important too – just ask an Olympic sprinter. Sprinters run short races, and because of that short distance the start is even more critical. They also tend to spend a disproportionate amount of time working on their start to their race, because sprinters know that a good start indicates how they will finish the race. You are not that different; just think about your day. How you begin your day indicates how your day will go. Did you give thanks to God this morning? Did you pray? Did you read your Bible? Did you think about how to grow in faithful obedience? If that’s the way your day regularly starts, that says a lot about how your daily race is going to turn out. Trajectory is important. There is a wise piece of advice that says, “Begin as you mean to go on.”

The Layout of Genesis

Genesis is important because it tells us where history is going with God’s people. The layout of Genesis is pretty straight forward, and it can be divided into two sections. The first section covers Creation to Noah (Ch 1-11). So, the first three chapters are about God, then Creation, then Adam and Eve, and then the Fall. Chapters 4–11 are about the time from Adam to Noah. The second section of Genesis covers the time of Abraham and his family (Ch 12-50). So, chapters 12–50 zoom in on the lives of Abraham and his family. Chapters 12–25 focus on Abraham, chapters 26–36 focus on his grandson Jacob, and chapters primarily focus 37–50 on Abraham’s great grandson Joseph.

His Character Revealed in His Creation: Holy, Just, Merciful, Sovereign

Some of the most important things we know about God in the Bible are not directly described in the Bible, but they are things about God that we observe. For example, one of the most important things we observe about God in creation is that he is self-existent, or that he is eternal. God was never created and therefore does not depend on anything. Does not need you. He does not need me. Rather it is the opposite. Because we are created, we need God. Genesis makes plain why we need him. So, the way we should read Genesis is that God reveals – through his creation – that he is holy, just, merciful and sovereign.

God is holy. This God's holiness is also something that we observe when we read Genesis, but what does it mean that God is holy? In short, God's holiness is what makes him different or separate from everything else. It is not just that God is sinless and perfect, but his sinlessness and holiness make him distinct or separate from everything else. Our translation for the word holiness comes from the Hebrew word *qadowsh*, and that word means "to cut." Holy means to be cut off or be separate from everything else.

Imagine you accidentally fall into some water, but not just any water – but raw sewage water. By your nature, that is not something that you like, and your desire to be separate from that water is something like a desire for holiness. You want to be separate from that filthy water. The difference is that God doesn't simply *want* to be holy, but by his nature he *is*. Like pouring oil into water, he is still separate from the water. It doesn't mix. He is separate, he is different, he is pure, sinless, and perfect. There was a time when God dwelled with man, in perfect harmony in the Garden of Eden. However, because of the Fall we are polluted by sin, and God separated from his people. He is the clean water; we are the dirty water. He is holy, we are not.

God punishes sin. It is plain to see that God punishes sin wherever it is found. God cursed Adam and Eve for their sin and expelled them from the Garden of Eden. God then flooded all the earth because the earth was corrupt and filled with violence. Just

take a minute to reflect on the horror of the flood. Just imagine if there was a flood in Hardin County that destroyed all the houses, business, and killed the entire county – except for 8 people who survived in a boat. How tragic would it be for the loss of all your Family? How tragic the loss of so many friends? The 110,000 bodies of the entire population of Hardin County? The billions of dollars in property damage? The numerous animal carcasses? Now imagine that upon the whole earth. Our children's books are a betrayal when the flood is portrayed as a happy Noah on a boat with smiling animals. Noah witnessed unspeakable death, drowning, and disaster. Noah's ark is not represented by a children's toy that floats in a bathtub, and – along with the expulsion from the Garden, the cross of Christ, and the Second Coming of Christ – it is one of the four great judgements against humanity. God will punish sin.

God is merciful. While God is holy, and therefore he must punish sin, the book of Genesis also paints a picture of God's abundant mercy. God punished Adam and Eve's sin, but he is merciful in that he gave a promise of redemption to them. So, as God punished sin, he also mercifully promised to deliver his people from sin – *at the same time*. God is holy and punished sin by flooding the world, but God is merciful in that he saved Noah and his family – and the New Testament describes Christ as our ark (1 Peter 3:18-22). So, while God is holy and will punish sin – he also is our redeemer, forgiver of sins, and caring Father in heaven.

God is sovereign. What does it mean that God is sovereign? It simply means that as Creator, he has a right to rule everything. Providence is a little different – it means that the way God rules is right as well. God is rightful to rule and the way he rules is also right. He is holy, perfect, and sinless. It means that he does has never done, anything wrong, he will not do anything wrong, and he will never do anything wrong. So, when we read through a book like Genesis, we must keep in mind that we are to submit to his sovereign and provident rule. God knows all the information, to all things, at all times, and he makes perfect judgements.

His Character Revealed in His People: Holy, Just, Merciful, Sovereign

So, we have seen that the way to read and think about Genesis is to keep in mind that God reveals his holiness, justice, mercy, and sovereignty through his creation. Yet, God also reveals the same things through his people. In the second part of Genesis, we get to what is the most crucial and important event between the fall of man in the Garden of Eden and the cross of Christ on Calvary – the calling of Abraham. This event demonstrates who God is through Abraham and you. So, if you want to see how God's holiness, justice, mercy, and sovereignty work in your life, then Genesis 12-50 is essential to understand and apply.

God is holy. We have seen how God reveals his holiness in creation, and he also requires holiness from people. Through Genesis, we see that God requires his people to display his holiness through the way his people live.

One of the most explicit ways that we see that God expects his people to be holy is through the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Bible tells us that:

Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground ... And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. And he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and he looked and, behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.

So, Abraham and his people are called to be separate, distinct, and holy from the surrounding world – and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah refused to be holy. However, we are called to be holy. When we do this, we fulfill our purpose in that we bear the image of God to the rest of the watching world (Gen 1:26-27; cf. Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). So, not only does God reveal his holiness through creation, but he also reveals his holiness through his people. This means that if you are one of God's people, you are called to be holy; you are called to reflect God's holiness.

God is merciful. We have seen that God desires to reveal his holiness through his people, and we have seen how God punishes sin when a people refuse to be holy. This, however, does not mean that God does not display mercy. In fact, God's holiness is increasingly displayed, his mercy is also increasingly displayed. When God displays his mercy to his people, this is often described as God *remembering* his people. So, for instance:

[God] blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark. And the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days. But God **remembered** Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark (Gen 7:24-8:1).

When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will **remember** my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh (Gen 9:14-15).

So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God **remembered** Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived (Gen 19:29)

Then God **remembered** Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." And she called his name Joseph, saying, "May the LORD add to me another son!"

So, we see that God reveals his mercy through his people – he gives his people the much-needed mercy. This shows that even in the midst of judgement, he is still merciful. As you read through Genesis, an important way to know the character of God is observe how God gives mercy to his people. Surely, this is the story of how God redeems his people through all history and how God continues to redeem his people even today. We are redeemed by his mercy and grace.

God is sovereign. When you look at God's people in the second part of Genesis, you should ask yourself, "How else could God work out his saving plan of his people unless he is sovereign?" So, in Genesis we observe God's sovereign and saving grace being displayed through his people.

Notice that Abraham did not seek out God, but God sought out Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). God sovereignly chooses Abraham and not his brother Nahor. Next, we see that God chooses Isaac and not Ishmael (Gen 17:19-21). Next, we see that God chooses Jacob and not Esau (Mal 1:2-3; Rom 9:13). God sovereignly prohibits Abimelech in acting out his affections toward Abraham's wife Sarah (Gen 20:6). God also proclaims that his people will be oppressed in Egypt for 400 years (Gen 15:13-14). God is sovereign, from the biggest events to the small events.

Summary and Conclusion

The book of Genesis not only reveals to us not only that God reveals his holiness, justice, mercy, and sovereignty through his creation and his people, but Genesis also reveals to us how we should respond. In short, we are to trust and obey. We are to respond to the words of God in the same way that Abraham did: in faith. Of all people in the Bible, the apostle Paul points to Abraham as the example of how we are to respond to the words of God when he referenced the book of Genesis in Romans 3:4, "For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

Therefore, as we read through the book of Genesis, we are to trust and obey. We trust in the God who reveals himself as holy, just, merciful, and sovereign God. IN response to this revelation, we are then to obey him, love him, cherish him, and place him above all things. As you read through Genesis, remember these things and you will grow in your understanding of God, his character, and how he is working in your life.

Discussion Questions

There are two sections of questions: group and personal. Both sets of questions can be covered while at Discipleship Track. However, you are also encouraged to take the personal questions home and think about in your personal life from day to day and discuss with your parents. This way, you can have your parents encourage you, pray for you, and help walk with you as you seek to grow in Christ.

Group Questions and Discussion

1. What are the four characteristics of God that are revealed in Genesis? Give an example where Genesis displays each attribute.
2. What does it mean for God to be sovereign? Why does God have this right?
3. What is God's providence? Why does God have the right?
4. How can a local church collectively display God's holiness and mercy concurrently?

Personal Questions and Application

5. How can the four characteristics of God be displayed in your life?
6. How can knowing you are not sovereign and are subject to God's providence help you take comfort in day to day life?
7. How can we magnify God's sovereignty and providence in our own lives? How can both characteristics of God bring comfort to you?
8. How can you to displays God's holiness and mercy concurrently in your life?