

## “GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT”

### SESSION #5

#### 7. Seven main characters in Genesis

Let's begin with a quick review of the 7 main characters that show up in the book of Genesis. These people are what might be called “types”, as Sidlow Baxter suggests:

Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

First of all, let's start with **Abel**, the man who was killed by his brother Cain. Abel could be said to be the **man of spiritual desire**. The reason for that can be seen in the way he is in direct contrast with his brother Cain. The word ‘Cain’ means ‘possession’, and Cain's whole focus as you look at their story is obviously a downward, earth-centered focus. Cain, when he came to bring God some offerings, brought some fruit of the ground. But the ground had already been cursed! And yet Cain, a farmer, said, *“I'll work hard to produce these crops, I'll bring the fruit of my labor to God, and He must accept this as my offering.”*

On the other hand, Abel came offering a sacrifice from his flock of sheep or goats. And that sacrifice was both a confession of his sin and the expression of a strong desire for fellowship with God.

Surely those two boys had learned very clearly from their father and mother, Adam and Eve, what it was that God required in terms of dealing with sin. But Cain doesn't pay any attention to God's method. Abel does because he evidently wants to walk with God, live with God, follow God.

And God records that when those two offerings were presented to Him, He did not accept Cain's but He accepted Abel's. And, of course, that created tremendous jealousy on the part of Cain.

So Abel, a man of spiritual desire.

**Enoch**, the **man of spiritual choice**. The reason we can say this is that although we don't know very much about Enoch one thing is recorded about him that is very significant, and that is that *"he walked with God"*. Amos, chapter 3 verse 3 declares this truth: *you cannot walk with someone else unless you are first agreed*.

Here is a man of whom it was said, *"He walked with God."* So, that is not possible unless he and God agreed together. Obviously, Enoch is a man who agreed with God; he chose to go God's way. And he walked in such a close fellowship, as someone has famously suggested, that on one of their walks they get too far away from Enoch's home and it became evening. And God said, *"Hey, it's kinda late. Too late for you to go home. Why don't come to My house tonight."* And the Bible says, *"God took him."* "He was not, for God took him." He just disappeared, and God took him home without dying. He's an unusual character. That's how closely he walked with God. A man who *chose* to walk with God; to let God's will be his will.

Then **Noah**, a **man of spiritual renewal**. His experience in the flood, as Peter tells us, was anticipating regeneration. Baptism – going into the waters of baptism and coming out of the water – is a symbol of what has happened inside a person: regeneration.

In typical biblical paradox, when you look at the Flood, the instrument of judgment was water. The water is what killed everybody. But the paradox is that it was the very same water that floated the ark and provided salvation for Noah and his family, the 8 people who restarted the human race. God's means of deliverance was the very same water that was used to judge. When you look at the cross of Jesus Christ you see a similar paradox.

Noah becomes a symbol of a person who is renewed spiritually, and he goes through the flood and comes out as the new person, head of a family of 8 ready to start everything anew.

**Abraham**, the **man of faith**, the father of the faithful, a man who believed God with an incredible kind of faith. And not just belief in his head but a man who believed in such a way that he exhibited true biblical faith.

He **acted** on what he believed. God said, *“Leave your home, leave your family, and go to a land that you don’t know... but I will show it to you when you get closer.”* And Abraham just went out *“not knowing where he was going”*. That’s faith. God said, “Go”. He just went. A man of enormous faith.

The fifth major person in Genesis is **Isaac**. He was really only famous for one thing: he was a son. The **life of sonship** is what he demonstrates. He was uniquely a son, specially promised by God to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. His birth was very special, the only son of his mother. But he’s a very ordinary character in many ways.

He’s the *son* of an extraordinary character because he had a great father in Abraham. And Isaac himself had an extraordinary *son* whose name was Jacob. I think it’s rather like a sandwich in reverse: the goodies are on the top and bottom; in the middle is plain bread - Isaac.

The sixth person is **Jacob**, a man who personifies the **life of service**. I think this is really what Jacob was all about even though he made so many mistakes in how he went about serving God.

His manner, his methodology were wrong time and time again, and he has become rather infamous among the characters of Scripture because of that. But as you read carefully the story about this incredible personality, Jacob, I think you will find that at heart he really wants to serve God. His purpose is generally in the right direction.

How he goes about it just gets warped over and over again by this scheming character. And God deals with him in chapter 32 – it’s a very strategic chapter in the story of these characters.

Jacob wrestles with the angel of God – God coming perhaps in a human form to wrestle with Jacob. And you remember the story that as they wrestled until the early hours of the dawn, neither party could win and overcome the other. Finally the angel of the Lord said, *“Dawn is coming. Let me go.”*

And what did Jacob say, *“No way. I’m not letting you go until... what?... until you bless me.”* That was the cry of Jacob’s heart over and over again. He wanted to know God, he wanted to serve God, he wanted God’s blessing. He just went about it in crazy ways. But

when he finally had a chance to grab God, he said, *“I’m not letting go now; you bless me.”* And God said what? How did God respond? When you read the story for the first time it doesn’t make any sense because God doesn’t deal with Jacob’s request for blessing. God turns around and out of the blue, as it were, asks him a question.

What was the question? *“What is your name?”* “What’s my name got to do with anything?” But his name had everything to do with it, because what was Jacob’s name? What did it mean?

He was named from birth as he grabbed hold of the heel of his twin brother Esau coming out of the womb. So he was named “the Grabber – Jacob”. The sneaky, tricky schemer who would do everything in his power to grab, grab, grab. That’s who he is. He was that way from the first day, and he was always like that. That was his personality, that was his character, that’s who he was. And God says, *“Who are you? What’s your name?”*

And Jacob has to admit to God, *“I’m Jacob. You got me. I’m the tricky schemer. I’m the guy who wants to grab everything all the time. I want to have my own way. I want to get the best out of life, no matter what it takes.”* And when he finally confesses to God who he is, ah! God blesses him. God changes his name and says, *“No, you’re no longer that tricky schemer, deceitful ‘Jacob’. You’re now – what? Israel – prince with God. That’s who you are.”*

I don’t know if you identify with any of these characters. I tend to identify with this guy. Maybe you do too.

At heart, that’s what we really want: we really want to serve God, we want His blessing. We don’t always go about it the best way. Our methods, our manner aren’t always right. God wants to come to us and bless us. But He’s gonna say, *“Hey, would you just admit who you are first of all? Confess it. Agree with me about who you are deep down inside.”* And when we do that, then God says, *“I’ll change you. You’ll be a prince with God.”*

Character #7: **Joseph** – the **life of suffering and the life of glory**.

Someone has suggested that he is the most complete single ‘type’ of Christ to be found anywhere in the Bible. And I think if you look at his story, you’ll have to agree. This is a person whose story line and what happens to him in his story reflects something of the reality of what happens later to Jesus Christ.

For example, when we see Joseph early in his teenage life, he is obviously the Beloved Son of his father, as evidenced by that special coat.

Then he goes to the next stage: he is a rejected servant. He is hated by his brothers, he is sold into slavery. He ends up going down to Egypt and suffering as a slave and working as a servant.

He is accounted dead by his father.

That’s all true of Jesus. But that’s not the end of Joseph’s story. He has one of the most phenomenal stories of any character in history.

He becomes the prime minister of Egypt. He saves nations from famine. He is the exalted Saviour. And Jesus, of course, is exactly that. The life of suffering but the life of glory. That is Joseph.

J. Sidlow Baxter suggests that these 7 characters provide an analogy of the Christian life.

We must begin first of all with a desire for God, like Abel.

And then making a choice to go with God like Enoch did.

And when we make that choice, there is a rebirthing within us like what is pictured in the story of Noah. A renewal, a spiritual rebirth.

And when that happens we begin to live and move in a different realm, not the realm of sight but the realm of faith – the life of Abraham.

Then we are characterized by this one thing especially: we are sons and daughters of the heavenly Father – a life of “sonship” like Isaac.

And as we are, we get involved in serving Him – the story of Jacob.

And that service involves suffering but it will ultimately lead to glory, as it did for Joseph.

So, seven characters providing some hints here in the form of analogies as to what much of the Christian life is like.

Let's do a short review. Genesis – the two parts. It's not just a primeval history and a patriarchal history. We see a *personal universe* because God Himself is a person who created as a person with a purpose.

And then secondly, that purpose gets worked out increasingly, and we see this especially in the second section of Genesis. God is working out His purposes for His people and His creation aiming at making everything new, as Romans 8 says, with His glory and our good, our blessing, in view. That's what God's intention is: His glory and our blessing. It's a *personal universe*. It's a universe with *purpose*.

And then the **theme** of the book of Genesis. It's the book of beginnings, but it's also the **book of divine sovereignty**. God is sovereign, He is the Lord of all right from the very first verse.

If you compare the beginning of this book with the end of it, chapter 1 with chapter 50, you'll see a very instructive contrast. Chapter 1 declares that "*it (creation) was good*". But as you get to chapter 50 we find the people of God are now heading into bondage in Egypt. And the last verse of this book of Genesis ends in a coffin in Egypt.

And the last word of the entire Old Testament, in Malachi 4, is the word "curse". It's an appropriate ending to the tragic downward trend through the Old Testament.

The fall of man sets the stage for the rest of the Bible story. A famous nursery rhyme could be seen as a parable of the Old Testament story:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.  
All the king's horses and all the king's men  
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

All of us are “Humpty Dumpty” who participated in a great fall that has left us broken and separated from God. The rest of the Old Testament is all about the inadequate efforts to put us back together again. As Charles Price said, *“the law, prophets, priesthood and sacrifices foreshadowed what was to come but, in themselves, could not put us together again”*.

How absolutely essential it is that we have the New Testament because if we didn’t, where do we end up if we just have the Old Testament? We only have this sad story of the outworking of man’s sin but no final answer as to how it can be handled. And surely that last word in the OT could be a very grim reality indeed: “curse”, unless we can flip over the page and come into the book of Matthew and the rest of the New Testament.

These 39 Old Testament books then provide the background for the wonderful good news of the New Testament.

As we look at the book of Genesis as a prelude to the rest of the Old Testament we begin to see very clearly that there is a flow to history. History started somewhere and the book of Genesis tells us how and where it started. It doesn’t give us all the details but it gives us what we need to know. History started somewhere with a personal God of purpose. And it’s moving somewhere, it’s not just meandering all over the cosmos by chance.

God, a purposeful God, is moving it there all the way from a garden where it begins in the early chapters of Genesis through to Revelation chapter 21 where the story of man’s history will end in its focal point in the garden city. A city called the New Jerusalem, in which there is a river, and there are trees and there’s a garden.

But it’s a city in which God dwells. And God and the Lamb are on the throne in that city. And God is going to move all human history towards that particular focal point. Nothing on earth or in the cosmos is going to stop Him from ever getting to that destination. And because He’s moving to that destination, I hope you’re moving with Him. I hope you’re on the same track with Him. I hope you’re agreeing with Him concerning what He says about you, about sin and about the way to be on His path.

Because God is in control. He is the Sovereign One. We want very much, as His people, to be in tune with Him, walking with Him, working with Him. Moving together and helping others move together toward that future when He indeed will be King of kings and Lord of lords.

In our next session we will see Israel's exodus from Egypt and the importance of the Tabernacle.

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