

# Lesson Two

## Making Sense of the Bible's Story

As I talked about in the large group lesson, the Bible is first and foremost a story of all that God has done to draw His wayward people back to Himself—to make a way for us to come into His kingdom and enjoy His presence.

It would be impossible for one Bible study lesson to get to the bottom of God's heart, plans, and purposes. My hope for this lesson is to help you to understand the framework of God's plan so that you will be able to more readily recognize how the different stories and characters fit into the larger story.

### GOD'S COVENANT PROMISES

Throughout history, God has made six major promises to His people. These promises (or *covenants*) have furthered His plans and revealed His purposes for the redemption and restoration of His creation.

In my opinion, it's impossible to understand the story of the Bible without a working knowledge of these covenants. When we say that God is faithful, we mean that He does what He says He will do. It is imperative, then, that we know *what* He has said He will do!

I introduced these covenants in the lecture this week, and you have a covenant timeline that you can reference as you complete these questions. We're going to spend some time looking through the Bible to see where these covenants are introduced in order to understand God's purposes in making them.

As you read and consider God's promises, I pray that you will marvel at His faithfulness displayed throughout time.

### God's Promise to Adam and Eve

We're going to start as far back as we can go—in the Garden of Eden, with two broken-hearted humans the moment they realize that they have turned from their Creator. He came to find them, and they covered in shame. The promise God made to Adam and Eve is not specifically called a *covenant*, but it is foundational to understanding the plans of God.

1. Read Genesis 2:16-17 and 3:1-13. How did Adam and Eve disobey God?

2. God addressed the problem of Adam and Eve's disobedience in Genesis 3:14-19. Read Genesis 3:15 in the New American Standard translation of the Bible. For clarity, I've added in the nouns that the pronouns are referencing:

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he [the seed of woman] shall bruise you [Satan] on the head, and you [Satan] shall bruise him [the seed] on the heel.”

- ◇ What would the seed of woman do? What is God's promise to His children?

It will never cease to comfort me that God met His children with a promise in the same moment He acknowledged their problem. As soon as God's people realized they needed a deliverer, God promised to deliver one—the Seed of woman who would one day crush the deceiver's head.

### God's Covenant with Noah

The second major promise we'll consider is found in the covenant that God made with Noah.

3. What was the problem in the days of Noah according to Genesis 6:1-4 and what did God decide to do about this problem in Genesis 6:7?

Even as God dealt with the wickedness of mankind, He remained faithful to the promise He had made in Genesis 3, preserving Noah and his family through the flood. (See Genesis 6:8-18.)

4. As you consider God's provision for Noah through the flood, look back at the promise God had made to Adam and Eve. What would have happened to the promised Seed if all the first woman's offspring had been destroyed in the flood?

Is God's judgment and justice found in the floodwaters? Certainly. But hope is also sealed within the watertight ark of God's provision.

5. God's covenant with Noah was made after the flood. Read Genesis 8:20-9:17. What promises does God make in this covenant? What is the duration of this covenant? (See 8:20-22, 9:11-16.)

## God's Covenant with Abraham

Generations after Noah, one of his descendants was called out from among his father's people.

Read Genesis 12:1-7.

6. Whom do we meet in Genesis 12:1, and what does God ask of him? (Abram was later renamed Abraham, but for simplicity's sake we'll refer to him as Abraham throughout.)

Here we find the introduction of the "Abrahamic Covenant." It's expounded upon in Genesis 15 and 17, but the promise of the covenant is introduced here in Genesis 12. The promise contained several components:

- ◇ **Land:** God would give Abraham and his descendants a specific land. (Genesis 12:1 and 12:7)
  - ◇ **Nation:** God would make of Abraham a great nation. (Genesis 12:2)
  - ◇ **Blessing:** God would bless those who blessed Abraham, curse those who cursed Abraham, and in Abraham, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. (Genesis 12:3)
  - ◇ **Seed:** God would give Abraham a biological offspring through whom God would continue His covenantal promises. (Genesis 12:7 and 15:4)
7. The covenant with Noah is confirmed again in Genesis 17:1-14. According to Genesis 17:7, how long would His promise to Abraham endure?

God honored His promise to Abraham. When he was 100 years old, Abraham fathered his son Isaac. Isaac fathered Jacob. Jacob was renamed Israel, and Jacob had twelve sons. Through a series of events, the family of Jacob (Israel) ended up in Egypt (Genesis 21-50). Eventually, the multiplying descendants of Abraham and growing family of Israel became enslaved to the Egyptians (Exodus 1-2). They remained enslaved for 400 years until God used Moses to deliver His people from their bondage in Egypt.

## The Old Covenant

After miraculously leading His people out of Egypt and across the parted Red Sea (Exodus 1-15), God transformed the once-enslaved descendants of Abraham into the nation God had promised. He made another covenant. This time His covenant was made with the nation of Israel through Moses as the mediator (Exodus 19-24).

Read Exodus 19:1-6.

8. What did God promise to the Israelites?
  
9. Were there conditions of this covenant? What was Israel required to do to keep the covenant?

Unlike God's promises to Adam and Eve, to Noah, and to Abraham, this covenant had conditions. These conditions, or commandments, are the reason that we sometimes hear this covenant referred to as "The Law." It told the Israelites how to live. The Israelites were required to meet certain requirements to uphold their part in the covenant that God was making with them.

### God's Covenant with David

In the generation after Moses, under the leadership of Joshua, the Israelites entered the Land that God had promised to Abraham and began to take possession of it. After the period where the judges ruled Israel followed by a failed reign of their first king (Saul), God raised up a king "after [His] own heart"—King David (Acts 13:21-22).

Under David's reign, Israel enjoyed military success. They took control of more of the land that God had promised to them through Abraham. David's reign was the beginning of a very prosperous time for Israel.

Toward the end of his rule, David expressed his desire to build a Temple for God. To this point, the Tabernacle (a temporary, moveable structure) had been the Israelites' place of worship. God gave them the blueprints for the Tabernacle when He established the Old Covenant with them on Mount Sinai. In the Tabernacle, man brought their offerings to God, and God, in His glory, met with His people through priests. David wanted to build a beautiful, permanent structure to replace the simple tent of the Tabernacle.

Read 2 Samuel 7:4-17.

10. David didn't get to build the Temple, but what promise did God make to David in 2 Samuel 7:13-16?

A great king would come through the lineage of David: a King whose throne would be established forever. Here, as David desired to build "a house for God" and God pledged to build "a house of David," we find the promise of the Messiah, the Deliverer, the Savior, the *King*—the Son of David who would also be the Son of God.

## The New Covenant

Generations later, this forever-King would come.

11. From Jesus' genealogy in Luke 3:31-38, four names of significance should stand out to you from our lesson today. Circle them in your Bible and list them below.

The Seed had come: descended of woman with Adam, from the lineage of Noah, a biological offspring of Abraham, an Israelite by birth, and a (very-great-grand-)Son of David. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. God Himself in fragile human form. He grew up to be a man.

12. In Luke 22:14-23, Jesus inaugurated the sixth and final covenant that we are going to consider today. What did He say He was establishing by His blood according to verse 20?

13. Just before His death, what did Jesus say in John 19:30?

Jesus' work on the cross was complete. Our salvation was secured by the death of the Son of God. But the plans of God were not finished. In fact, we still await the Messiah's return and the culmination of His promises.

God will be faithful to every promise! Jesus Himself is coming back to fulfill every yet-future prophecy about what the Messiah will do. His Kingdom will come. His will *will* be done—on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). And we will rejoice to see that day. We will rejoice to see *His* Day!

14. Describe this Coming King from Revelation 19:11-16.

And as we wait, we have received the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of God's faithfulness (Ephesians 1:13-14). We are no longer asked to walk in God's ways according to our own strength. We are invited to rely on the Spirit for the strength we need, even for the *faith* we need to trust the Lord as we wait on Him—both ultimately for His return and personally in different circumstances in our own lives.

15. What is one circumstance in your life where you need the Holy Spirit's strength in order to continue to trust the Lord as you wait to see how it works out?

## THE BOOK OF RUTH

Our assignment with the book of Ruth this week is not a long one, but I want us to spend just a moment determining where Ruth fits into the timeline as we are learning it.

16. According to Ruth 1:1, when did Ruth live? Specifically, who was ruling?
  
17. Look at the more detailed Bible timeline. During what time period (this can be broad) did the judges rule?
  
18. Recreate the simplified timeline (see your notes from the lecture), and write in where the events of Ruth fit.

## WRAP-UP

Having taken some time this week to consider God's faithfulness to keep His promises on a grand scale, let's now take a moment to consider His faithfulness to us more personally.

19. I stated at the beginning of the lesson that we can only measure God's faithfulness based on whether He has done what He has said He would do. Is there any circumstance in your life that makes you doubt God's faithfulness? Looking at it now, is there anything God has promised to do that He hasn't done?
  
20. What does God promise in Isaiah 43:1-2? (He is speaking directly to Israel here, but as children of God, this is a promise that we can take personally as well.)

Sometimes I'm tempted to think that the waters or the fires—the trials of this life—are evidence that God's faithfulness has failed. But in fact, God didn't promise that

the fires and the floods wouldn't come. He promised that He would be present when they do.

21. What is your reaction to this promise of God? Take some time now to sit with Him and be honest about how you perceive His faithfulness to you. He can handle your questions. I pray you'll know His presence as you seek Him in this moment.