

# BEGINNINGS

## Genesis

# 2

*A God-created world . . . a God-formed people . . .  
two beginnings*



### *God created*

- How do you see the stories of creation fitting with modern scientific theories about how the world was created?

### *And God said, "It's all good!"*

- What's the most amazing thing to you about the world we live in?

### *God created humans from the earth for the earth*

- What do you think it means that people were called to "keep" the earth (2:15)?

## **CREATION!** (Genesis 1)

The Bible begins at the beginnings. "In the beginning when *God created . . .*" Right in the very first sentence of the Bible we run into a key statement about what we believe about God and matters of faith. Who created the world and everything in it? God. The beautiful stories in Genesis 1 and 2—about the creation of the universe, the earth, and all its inhabitants—are faith stories. Not science lessons. Not what we call history today. Faith stories.

You've probably heard the phrase, "It's all good!" Well, it was, according to God. That refrain appears over and over in Genesis 1: "God saw that it was good." Even the first human beings, our ancestors, were made in God's own image (1:27), and God gave the world to them as a gift. When you think about it, isn't this remarkable little planet floating in the vast universe still a wondrous place? Do we think of it as a gift?

Now, you might be thinking, *we* look at the world differently than those who wrote Genesis over 2,500 years ago or so. We know a lot more about the origins of the world—or at least we think we do. What about the Big Bang Theory, evolution, dinosaurs, or Ice Ages? How does Genesis fit with all that?

People have differing opinions about when the world began and how long it took to become the world we know and experience. Generally, our key faith statements don't try to explain these things. Science can give us some insights. Genesis, however, emphasizes the "who" of creation. God created. And God gifted. Thanks be to God!



*God is God and we aren't*

- Describe your understanding of the relationship between Creator and creation (including human beings).

*Sin is turning away from God and in on ourselves*

- Where do you see signs of the “upward fall” in the world? How can you stay “grounded” in your relationship with God? With others?

## FALLING UP (Genesis 2–4)

Creation was filled with good things, including a garden, which contained a tree called “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17). That tree came with a warning: Eating this fruit causes death!

This seems like a strange thing to put in the good garden. But there it was. And just to make sure the people didn't forget about it, a serpent kept reminding Eve and Adam about the fruit on that most special tree. What made it so special? Well, eating its fruit could open a person's eyes as wide as God's eyes. And God could see, and God knew, everything.

How could seeing through God's eyes be a bad thing? After all, humans were made in God's image. Why not take the next step up? So Eve and Adam reached up for the fruit that would take them to the next level, and they ate. They had committed the first sin, sometimes called “the Fall.” But their fall was an upward one. They tried to be like God; more than that, they wanted to be God.

It was the beginning of the end, the end of life in the garden as they had known it. They had to exit the garden and make a life for themselves on the outside looking in. As bad as it looked, God was still taking care of them, giving them clothes and the means to grow food.

It wasn't long before the consequences of their sin hit home. One of their sons—Cain—didn't like it when God gave his brother Abel's offering more attention. In a jealous rage, Cain killed his brother. Beat him to death right there in the field in front of God. Hard to believe, except when we look around and see that story reenacted every day. Hard to deny the power of sin in our lives.

Sin is the inability to fear, love, and trust God. We turn away from God and in on ourselves. We seek our own will first, and we use the gifts of creation, including other people, to gratify our own desires. It's why God acted in Christ Jesus to make us aware of our sin and our need to repent. Only then can we have a renewed vision of ourselves and our world. But that's getting way ahead of the story!



## DO OVER! (Genesis 6–9)

The “fall up” turned out to be the start of a bad slide down. A number of generations of human beings populated the earth and some even got involved with the “sons of God” (Nephilim). The human race was so wicked it became unbearable to God. God needed a mulligan, a do-over, so God had a man named Noah build a big—really big—lifeboat. An ark.

Noah was a righteous man who stood out in the sewer of sinful neighbors. So, Noah and his family got a ticket on the ark, and so did pairs of all the other creatures in the world. When the doors were shut and sealed, the rain began to fall, and fall. You’ve probably seen it rain pretty hard before. But this was serious rain. Endless rain. So much rain that the world and all its inhabitants outside the ark were drowned.

When the rain finally stopped and the water started to go down, the big lifeboat rested on a mountain. Noah opened the doors and let creation start its do-over. And God made a huge promise, a promise as wide as the rainbow sign that stretched across the horizon. He made a deal, a covenant, with Noah and all living creatures for generations to come: “I’ll never flood the earth like that again!”

The Bible is not the only place that reports a big flood like this one. It’s a common story in cultures around the world. It’s not hard to imagine world-changing catastrophes. Movie makers use special effects to picture earth’s destruction all the time. And headlines warn us that we human beings are changing the face of the earth moment by moment—and not always for the better. Even so, since the doors of the ark opened, the sun has come up each and every day.



## A PROMISING START

(Genesis 12:1—25:18)

The sun was coming up every day, and people began to populate the world once again. The Bible gives the names of many generations up to the family of a man named Terah, who had a son named Abram. Abram married a woman named Sarai. They lived in

### *God needed a do-over*

- What do you think of God’s “do-over”?

### *But never again . . . that’s a promise!*

- What does God’s commitment to all nonhuman creatures mean for us?
- How do you think we are doing caring for the gift of the earth?

Ur of the Chaldeans. That was somewhere in Mesopotamia, or modern-day Iraq.

*God formed a people . . .  
a second “beginning”*

- What do you think it means to be “called” by God?

A crazy thing happened next. God *called* Abram and Sarai and asked them to leave their home and take a long journey to a place called Canaan. Why Canaan? Seems God wanted Abram and Sarai to make a new beginning. But that was not all.

God has a habit of making and keeping promises in the Bible. And God made one of the biggest of all to Abram and Sarai. God promised them many descendants and a land to live in. That was no small promise. They were getting very old, and they didn’t have any children. Here’s the part that may be craziest of all—Abram and Sarai went for it. They believed God and went. That took nerve—and faith.

*God promised  
a big family,  
a land to live in,  
many blessings*

- What promises affect or shape your life?
- What do you think the phrase “Blessed to be a blessing” meant to Abram and Sarai and their family? What does it mean for you?

Abram’s faith became an example of faith throughout the whole Bible (see Romans 4). This was the beginning of blessing for all the world. God promised that, too—that through Abram and Sarai and their family, all the world would be blessed.

It was not a simple road they traveled. Abram almost gave away God’s promise when he loaned out Sarai to an Egyptian ruler. When they got tired of waiting to have their own baby, Sarai told Abram to try to have one with their servant Hagar. But when little Ishmael was born to Hagar, Sarai sent them away. Then when God did give Sarai and Abram a child (Isaac) in their old age, God asked Abram to sacrifice his only son—to kill Isaac in the name of God as a gift. That was a big “What?” But Abram faithfully made the arrangements. He was as close as a knife blade from killing Isaac when God stopped him.

*A tested faith*

- Name the ways Abram and Sarai’s faith was tested. How would you define “faith”?

Along the way, Abram and Sarai were given new names—Abraham and Sarah. They had a new land and a son and the promise of many descendants. God’s “first family” was ready to grow.



## FAMILY FEUD (Genesis 25:19—36:43)

Have you ever thought that maybe people in the Bible were perfect, or at least better than the rest of us? If so, you probably haven't heard this part of the story yet. Abraham and Sarah's children and grandchildren were quite a crew. Their son Isaac had twin sons with his wife Rebekah. The boys, Esau and Jacob, starting feuding right from the start, right

in their mother's womb! And when Esau was born first, brother Jacob was grabbing him by the heel. Because he was born first, Esau was in line for his father's birthright, the main share of the family fortune.

Rebekah favored Jacob, while Isaac favored Esau. When the boys grew up, Jacob tricked Esau into handing over the birthright. And Rebekah helped Jacob trick Isaac into receiving his father's blessing. There's that word again—blessing. The blessing given to Abraham and Sarah would continue through Jacob's side of the family. Esau became the head of another big family, and was blessed as well. His descendants would later show up as people of Edom.

Jacob's adventures were far from over. He wanted to marry a girl named Rachel, but her father Laban tricked him into marrying Rachel's older sister first. How did Laban do that? Check it out in Genesis 29. Eventually Jacob did marry Rachel too, and took his growing family and a bunch of livestock from his father-in-law and set off to settle down back in Canaan. Along the way, he wrestled with God, made up with his brother Esau, and had lots of children (including 12 sons) with two wives and two servants. God also repeated the family promises to Jacob and gave him a new name—Israel.



## GOD'S DREAMER (Genesis 37–50)

God's first family with father Jacob (Israel) was growing. And the feuding wasn't done yet! You'd expect some scuffles breaking out amongst twelve brothers, but one particular fight was a game-changer.

Joseph, one of Jacob's youngest sons, started it all. Seems Joseph had become his father Israel's favorite. He even got a long fancy robe from his father.

### *God's promises at work in real people*

- Does it surprise you that God's promises got worked out through family members who feuded, tricked one another, and even lied to get what they wanted? Why or why not?

### *Jacob is named Israel*

- God promised Jacob: "I am with you and will keep you wherever you go . . ." (28:15). How might this promise relate to your life?

### *Joseph's dream lands him in Egypt*

- How would you describe the way God was at work in Joseph?
- How would you say God is at work in you?

### *Joseph's dream interpretations save Egypt and his family*

### *God can turn bad to good*

- In what ways can bad circumstances be used for good? Have you ever experienced something like that?

Don't think the brothers didn't notice. Little Joseph was also a dreamer. He dreamed that his brothers would one day bow to him as their superior. He could've kept that dream to himself, but that wasn't Joseph's style. He told his brothers what he had dreamed. Bad idea.

The brothers resented Joseph, threw him down a well, and would have killed him, if it weren't for brother Reuben. He talked them out of killing Joseph. Good idea. Instead, they sold him to a band of traders passing through on their way to Egypt. The traders sold Joseph to Potiphar, an official of the Egyptian ruler or Pharaoh.

Joseph did a fine job as a servant in Potiphar's house. But soon Potiphar's wife took notice of the handsome young man and tried to coax Joseph into an affair. Joseph refused, so she accused him of trying to seduce her. That landed him in jail. That's where Joseph did some serious dream interpretation for two other inmates. He listened to their dreams and told them what they meant. It was bad news for one (Pharaoh's baker) and good news for the other (Pharaoh's cupbearer). The baker was hanged, but the cupbearer got his old job back. When Pharaoh started having weird dreams, the cupbearer told him about Joseph. Good idea.

Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams and was right on target. Pharaoh promoted him to a position of authority in charge of Egypt's food storage program, which saved the land when a bad drought hit. The same drought was hitting Canaan too, so Jacob (Israel) sent his sons to Egypt to beg for food. Guess who they had to bow down to and beg for help? They didn't recognize grown-up Joseph in his Egyptian uniform, but he recognized them.

Joseph could have taken his revenge for the well incident, but he didn't. He helped his brothers with food and eventually revealed to them who he was. He even invited his father Israel and the whole clan to live in Egypt because of the famine. He told his startled brothers: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, in order to preserve many people." And that included the whole family of Israel. The promises of God were alive and well.

## Background Files (Lutheran Study Bible)

Review the timeline on pages 30–32 in *Lutheran Study Bible*. Everything that happens in Genesis 1:1—11:26 is considered Prehistory. We generally don't assign dates to Prehistory. We aren't certain about when God called Abram and Sarai, but we can identify approximate dates for this based on a little clearer knowledge of when later events happened.

Take a look at the map called "The Ancient Near East and Key Locations in Genesis" on page 2098 of *Lutheran Study Bible*. Trace the journeys of Abraham and Sarah. Note the relationship between Canaan and Egypt. Keep in mind that the family of Jacob (Israel) was in Egypt at the close of the book of Genesis.



## PICTURING THE STORY

As you watch artist Joe Castillo picture the stories of Genesis, reflect on these questions:

- What part of the story stands out to you?
- In what ways is God at work in the story of beginnings?
- What part of the story do you want to know more about?
- If you could meet any person introduced in the story, who would it be? Why?



## SINGING AND PRAYING THE STORY

*The book of Psalms found in the Bible was the worship book of the people of Israel. The psalms are prayers and songs used to offer praise and thanks to God, ask for God's help, seek God's forgiveness, remember God's actions, and even complain or cry out to God. Christians use the psalms the very same way as we worship and as we reflect on our relationship with God.*

### Psalm 8

*A creation psalm that praises God as creator of heaven and earth.*  
Notice how the psalm connects with the story of beginnings.

### Psalm 32

*A prayer confessing sin and asking for forgiveness.*

With which parts of the story does this psalm connect?

## MARK IT

Choose one or more of the following passages from today's section of the story to read during the coming week. Mark your reading using the marking method shown here.

Genesis 1:1—2:4  
Genesis 22:1-19

Genesis 15:1-21  
Genesis 41:1-57

## Marking Your Bible

Make notes about the questions and insights you have as you read your Bible. The following symbols might be helpful.

- \* A chapter or verse important to me
- ! A new idea
- ✓ A passage to memorize
- ? Something not clear to me
- ∞ God's love
- Ⓢ A promise from God
- ≈ Something that connects with my experience
- † My relationship with God
- ↔ My relationships with others

## Next Time

In the next chapter we will see and hear about God's people on the move. To review this week's story and to help prepare for the next chapter, you are encouraged to read the following pieces from *Lutheran Study Bible*:

- Pentateuch Introduction, pages 45-46
- Genesis Introduction, pages 47-48
- Exodus Introduction, pages 124-125
- Leviticus Introduction, pages 189-191
- Numbers Introduction, pages 237-238
- Deuteronomy Introduction, pages 302-303