

Getting our Bearings in Genesis

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Date: 19 April 2015

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[0 : 0 0] well it's already been such a great day gathering together celebrating all that the Lord has been doing in Sean's life listening to Ephesians 3 so faithfully taught by Ian praying together what a great day it's already been and I hope what we do tonight won't spoil that at all just want to read a few verses from Psalm 105 and then I'll pray and then we'll get to work because we've just got a mere thousand odd verses to get through this evening the writer of Psalm 105 says this verse 16 he called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food and he sent a man before them Joseph sold as a slave they bruised his feet with shackles his neck was put in irons till what he foretold came to pass till the word of the Lord proved him true the king sent and released him the ruler of people set him free he made him master of his household ruler over all he possessed to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom let's pray together father god we thank you so much for your word father we thank you it's complete father thank you that it is all useful to us for correcting and admonishing for teaching and for training us in righteousness and so lord as we come to study a big section of it tonight father would you enable us to see the wood from the trees father would you teach us wonderful things about the god that you are and father may we leave here with a better handle on what you are saying to each of us that we might go and live differently this week as those that are known by the living God those that have been reconciled to the living God by the Lord Jesus and those indwelt by the living God by the Holy Spirit so father bless us and help us teach us father inspire us by your spirit we pray in Jesus name amen so tonight we're starting a new series we're not really starting it we're going to have like the warm up to our new series

Joseph and the Gospel of Many Colors if you're color blind that will just look weird to you it is an incredible series the story of Joseph captures many hearts many of us would have heard it countless times in Sunday school particularly when we just got some new coloring pens in and could do the coat in about 16 colors that Woolworths were selling back in the day we would have also seen it portrayed in music in probably with Jason Donovan or Philip Schofield or somebody else it's a story that we all know really well but I do think it is probably the story that we tend to abstract from the rest of the Bible they almost treat it as like a lay-by where we go for a little while to hear about a great story about a dysfunctional family about a jealous set of brothers who sell their brother who goes off on a journey who ends up in prison and by the end of the story he's the Prime Minister of the most powerful country in the world but I think if we're going to get the most out of this series we have to place the life of Joseph within the context of Genesis and within the broad sweep of the entire Bible or else it may just be a 10-week study in moralism that we're going to say you should all be more like Joseph and less like his brothers you should all use your positions of authority like Joseph did in Potiphar's house and don't whatever you do be like Potiphar's wife it's going to be be like him don't be like her unless we can place it within God's grand story if we can get a handle on Genesis get a broad overview of how it fits together then I hope it'll make our appreciation of Joseph all the more and our sermons in Joseph just a little bit thicker that transcend a few lovely choruses by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice but it does feel a bit like making a canapé out of a rhinoceros taking a huge chunk of Bible and trying to condense it down in the short time that we have into something that's useful and digestible so bear with me we're all going to have to do a warm-up if you've got your Bible open go like this because we're going to have to turn a lot of pages if you're in your iPhone go like this because you're going to do a lot of scrolling down and a lot of scrolling up but we do know don't we that beginnings are important beginnings are important we have phrases like start as you mean to go on

Mary Poppins that great philosopher a job well done a job well begun is nearly half done a job well begun is nearly half done Plato a great Disney character the beginning is the most important part of any work if anyone's ever built anything particularly if it was a house how you start the foundations are really going to be the foundation of everything else you build if you make them shallow Jesus even tells a story doesn't he about foundations built in sand the rain came down and the floods came up and the house on the sand fell flat the opening lines of a book are important if we don't judge it by the cover we're going to read the opening lines and decide whether we're going to continue did you know there's a trend in London that on the same day you register your birth with the registrar you also put your son or daughter's name down on the waiting list for the best nurseries in town because we know don't we that we want to give people the best start in life the best beginning they can have it may surprise you to know but I spent a disproportionate amount of time on the introduction to a sermon because I think if I can grab your attention in the first two minutes you might just stay with me for the next five how you begin your day is important if I come and watch you get ready that sounds weird if I come and see you're the beginning of your day

I can pretty much predict how the rest of your day will go if you start the day rushed and stressed and tired then it's going to be a bad day I can tell you that if you start the day slothful and lazy and you hit the snooze button at least five times I dare say your day will be largely unproductive if you start your day prayerful with the Bible open thankful to the Lord for this great gift that he's given you it may just be a fruitful day beginnings are important beginnings set the trajectory for what follows so when we begin our Bibles in Genesis if we can understand it it will be a massive help to us because it is from Genesis that everything else sprouts and develops what God starts to reveal in Genesis he develops and ends in the book of Revelation it's from Genesis that we get our cosmology the doctrine of creation it's here we get our the beginnings of our theology our doctrine of God it's here we get our anthropology our doctrine of man here we get our hamatology our doctrine of sin our soteriology our doctrine of salvation our Christology the beginnings of our doctrine on Christ it's here we get our pneumatology our doctrine of the Holy Spirit our eschatology where it's all heading and the doctrine of the last things

Genesis has the dawning of death the institution of marriage the initiation of covenant the theology of work the biblical role of manhood and womanhood the first proclamation of the gospel the first allusions to the Trinity and the first sacrifice and many other prototypical events that will all be opened and developed during the rest of the Bible it's no coincidence that our in our world the most ferocious attacks by those that are anti-theists are in the book of Genesis because if we can dismiss how it all began then everything else unravels if we can do away with God as creator we can live how we like so we've got 50 chapters 1,533 verses some 40,000 words on a time period from the creation of the world to about 1600 BC we've got 21 minutes so we're going to try to wrestle this dense long theological tone into submission fingers at the ready

[9 : 55] Genesis actually splits into two great acts two great acts and the first one is chapters 1 to 11 and they're called pre-history and this is what happens in pre-history chapter 1 and the first bit of chapter 2 is creation that's the bit we know God spoke and it was God spoke and it was and it was good and it was good and it was very good and then in chapter 2 we get a second run at creation this time looking at the origins of man how God created man and he saw that it was very good chapter 3 deals with the fall of man man has one rule he cannot eat from the tree and he's got a choice whether he obeys or disobeys and he gets it wrong and so do all of us and then chapter 4 to the end of pre-history is the relentless spread of evil and this happens in three big events

Cain and Abel Noah and the flood and then the tower of Babel is this initial spark of sin as Eve and then Adam eat the forbidden fruit from the tree it spreads like a disease and a virus through every iota of society and then we get history which takes 12 to 50 and it's around three main characters 12 to 25 gives us Abraham or Abraham 25 to 36 gives us Jacob and 37 to 50 in multi-colors gives us Joseph and Isaac fits just here he's kind of spread between the Abraham narrative and the Jacob narrative and act 1 is like a panorama it's like the broad view of how it all got started and of how it all went wrong and then in history

God goes zooming into one family to one family that he chose out of Ur of the Chaldeans to be his chosen people through whom he would bless and bless the rest of the world and start to set in motion the most outrageous rescue plan ever conceived Genesis is a strange book it starts with God and his creation and ends with Joseph in a coffin in Egypt that's how broad and how specific it gets to get a good grasp of it we're going to need a vehicle to guide us through and Gordon Fee says in his book reading the Bible book by book he says the first of the five books of Moses relates to the beginning of everything and then focuses on God's call and covenant with Abraham and his seed promising to make them a numerous people and give them the land to live in so all I want to do this evening is I want to trace two themes through Genesis the first one is land and the second one is seed

I want to see what God is doing with land and then I want to see what's happening with this word seed you all look as excited as I am so let's crack on start with this start with land land in creation land in creation chapter 1 verse 9 says that God formed the land let the water under the sky be gathered to one place and let dry ground appear and it was so God called the dry ground land and the gathered waters he called seas and God saw that it was good then it goes on to say in the immediately next verses that God made land produce vegetation seed bearing plants to grow and to spread and then in chapter 1 verse 24 on the land let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds the livestock the creatures that move along the ground and the wild animals each according to its kind and it's also on day 6 that he makes man and there's something very interesting here that we should pause and look at that there's only two days in the 6th of creation where God speaks twice the first one is day 3 where land becomes life where land becomes life where inanimate becomes animate animate where land becomes vegetation and he speaks twice again in chapter 6 day 6 where we get animals and then humanity these are special days where God speaks twice making inanimate animate and then making animal man

God formed the land and then God filled the land with animals and then he says to the pinnacle of his creation man in verse 28 be fruitful in increasing number fill the land and subdue it he then says in chapter 2 verse 7 that man was formed from the dust of the land then the Lord formed a man from the dust of the land and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being in chapter 2 verse 15 the Lord took the man and put him to work in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it God formed the land God filled the land God said multiply and spread out across the land man was formed from the dust of the land man was placed in Eden to work the land it all starts so well but then chapter 3 comes along when the land is cursed look at verse 17 because you listened to your wife and ate the fruit from the tree about which

[16 : 28] I commanded you you must not eat from it cursed is the land because of you through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life chapter 3 verse 18 the land bites back it will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field chapter 3 verse 19 by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground since from it you were taken for dust you are and dust you will return the land is cursed the land bites back and man will return to the dust of the land from which he was created the perfect harmony purpose and provision of creation is spoiled and tainted and twisted by the fall and then it spreads it spreads absolutely everywhere we get Cain murdering

Abel and by the time we get to chapter 6 we see all the thoughts of man were only evil all the time chapter 6 verse 5 the Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time and God regretted he had made human beings on the earth and his heart was deeply troubled spoiled one bit of disobedience spreads we get murder and then we get this everyone's only thinking and doing evil all the time and so God wants to press reset the idea of the flood comes and chapter 6 verse 8 gives us this spark of a reset and a recreation but Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord evil spreads chapter 7 verse 21 the land is flooded it's de-creation we start

Genesis with the spirit of God hovering over the waters of the deep but now the waters of the deep return and cover the land as God de-creates and resets creation only Noah was left chapter 7 verse 23 only Noah was left and those with him in the ark and so we get this really interesting parallel between Noah and Joseph Noah preserves human life during the great flood Joseph preserves human life during the great famine there seems to be a slight symmetry to the role that each of them are playing chapter 9 verse 1 humanity is reset that creation mandate goes out again to Noah chapter 9 verse 1 be fruitful in increasing number and fill the land but we see that the reset isn't going as well as we'd hoped chapter 9 verse 20

Noah a man of the land proceeded to plant a vineyard when he drank some of its wine he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent isn't it interesting the symmetry there between Adam and even the garden getting into trouble with the fruit of the land and now Noah again getting into trouble with the fruit of the land planting a vineyard getting drunk and passing out naked in his tent it seems that sin is more than just environmental it seems that the reset didn't work because unfortunately in Noah doing a geographical he took himself with himself and this ingrained sin that had spread to every iota of humanity travelled with him so even on Ararat he's getting into trouble and making bad choices it's true for each of us sin in our lives is not because we're being infected from outside it's because we're broken inside and until we get that we'll only ever be asking

God to change our circumstance and what God needs to do is change our hearts because we're so tainted and infected by sin then we get to Babel in chapter 11 and God says spread out fill the land and the people in verse 4 said no they find the plain of Shinar they build a temple and they say they build a tower and they say come let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth disobedience again God says spread out and fill the land and they say no let's build a tower to literally reach to the heavens so we can totally do away with God and again be the masters of our own lives the gods to our own selves but in chapter 11 verse 9

[21 : 51] God sees he comes down he confuses the language and they're scattered over the whole world the human disobedience won't thwart the plans of God that his creation might be indwelt by his people and then the narrative slows down a lot in chapter 12 moving from these big global vistas to one family and we get Abraham chapter 12 verse 1 the Lord said to Abraham go from your land your people and your father's household to the land I will show you go to the land I will show you and as we read in Hebrews this is credited to Abraham as righteousness that his faith was credited to him as righteousness that he left everything he knew to obey a God who spoke to him he gets a little sidetracked in chapter 12 verse 10 that there's a famine in the land that he's going through so he goes down to

Egypt to live there for a while because of the famine there he gets into all sorts of trouble trying to say Sarah that his wife is actually his sister it's always going to get you into trouble and again it's interesting because during a famine Abraham goes to Egypt obviously the hero that we're going to learn about Joseph during a famine goes down to Egypt not by choice but in chapter 26 we learn about Isaac and there's a famine and God says to him whatever you do don't go down to Egypt chapter 26 verse 2 do not go down to Egypt live in the land where I tell you to live stay in this land for a while and I will be with you and will bless you seems to be something really interesting there going on in the life of Isaac and yet back to

Abraham gets a covenant ratified in chapter 15 I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it when Abraham arrives in the land God says you've arrived and one day this will all be yours but in chapter 15 verses 13 to 16 we get the beginnings of the idea that Egypt is going to play a role chapter 15 verse 13 then the Lord said to him know for certain that for 400 years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and ill treated there and I will punish the nation they serve as slaves and afterwards they will come out with great possessions you however will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age in the fourth generation your descendants will come back here for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure

God says I'm going to give you this land Abraham or Abraham by this point I'm going to give you this land but before you take possession of it fully you're going to go to Egypt for 400 years and as we learn in Exodus when we did it this oppression in Egypt is going to teach God's people what their God is like that he is strong and powerful that he redeems that he rescues and he does it with his mighty outstretched hand against the Pharaoh but see as well that the promised land is a gracious gift of God but also the promised land is severe judgment on the Amorites they're not going to use it well that their wickedness will only increase and that's why when we get to Joshua they're all punished because they've turned their back on God and their sin is explicit in chapter 26 verse 3 and 5 this covenant is reiterated to Isaac and in chapter 28 verses 13 to 15

Jacob is included in this covenant again but there's a big twist there's a big twist at the end of the book that God has already told Abraham about which Isaac will know about which Jacob will know about because in verse 26 chapter 46 verse 1 Jacob set out with all that was his and when he reached Bathsheba he offered a sacrifice to the God of his father Isaac chapter 46 verse 5 Jacob left Bathsheba and Israel's sons took their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the carts that Pharaoh had sent to transport him so Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt taking with them their livestock and the possessions they had acquired in Canaan so we get this amazing twist

[27:18] God says you've got this land but by the end of the book they're all in Egypt and there's only one bit of the promised land that they own the cave of Machpelah that Abraham purchased to bury Sarah in in chapter 23 verse 9 and in chapter 49 we realize that's where all the descendants have been buried chapter 49 verse 29 then he gave them these instructions that's Joseph I am about to be gathered to my people bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre in Canaan which Abraham bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite there Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried there Isaac and his wife Rebecca were buried and there

I buried Leah the field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites by the time we get to Genesis there's this great promise that this land will be yours and your descendants but they only own one little cave in one little corner of the land and yet I think we learn as we read in Hebrews that there's great faith here exhibited by Joseph by faith Joseph when his end was near spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning his burial of his bones see how that is real faith that Joseph was a really big deal in Egypt he was an absolute hero who had saved a whole nation from starvation and yet he believed all that God said that Egypt this is not your home this is not where you're going to remain so he says

I'm going to die but when you go when God comes and rescues you and brings you into all that he's promised take me with you take my bones and put them with Abraham and Sarah and Leah and Isaac bury me with my people in the land God has promised great amount of Genesis is about land about God working out his purposes great amount of the story of Joseph is about faith how it is God getting his people into Egypt so he can rescue them and teach them about himself but great faith exhibited by Joseph saying I believe God what you said is true and I want to be part of it Egypt is not my home but you are going to take us and be in the land that you promised that's so similar to us isn't it God says this is not your land this is not where you are meant to be this is not where you are to permanently reside we are just here and in the exodus that the

Lord Jesus has led being welcomed into that land that has been promised that place that the Lord Jesus has been preparing ever since his ascension and I wonder if that's one of the lessons we're to learn from Joseph to not let our roots go down too deep in this land but to know that there is a promised land far better than Canaan promised to Abraham that's where we're to be looking that's what we're to be living for and that's where we're to orientate all of our lives knowing that one day we'll reside there forever as a gracious gift from a good God Joseph knew that through redemption they would take possession of the land God had promised through our redemption through the Lord Jesus we like Joseph are to have that faith that will be welcomed into the land that new world that recreated perfection that God has promised that's land there's a lot of it to get through now let's go through seed and this will take us a lot less time the whole story starts in chapter 3 verse 15 the first pronouncement of the gospel in the

Bible and I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers he will crush your head and you will strike his heel the seed of the woman would be the way that the curse of sin would be undone and this means that everybody born next are they that seed are they that one whom God is going to use to redeem the world who's going to be this promised seed and so we get Adam's children and the promised seed is obviously not able because he's dead and it's obviously not going to be Cain because he's the one who made able dead and is being and is responsible and is now cursed to wander the world alone but then we get Seth and Seth is the line through which the promised seed will come and it's from Seth that we get Noah if you want to read that chapter 5 we'll let you into all the intricate details about the family tree and Noah has three sons and we wonder which ones of these is going to be the line of the promised seed it's not particularly obvious although Ham is cursed because he sees his dad passed up naked and we learn that it's not

[33 : 26] Japheth but it is in fact Shem Shem is the one who is the promised seed and we pick that up in chapter 11 verse 10 and from Shem we get terror and terror seems to be a bit of a weird inclusion because nothing really happens except we learn that terror took terror was related to Abraham Abraham promised and called by God and Abraham's got a bit of a checkered life that God says you're going to have a son and Abraham decides it's a DIY kind of job so he gets given Hagar by Sarah to try and give himself a son but this is the DIY lie and Ishmael is not the promised lie and Ishmael is interesting it's Abraham's

DIY attempt to grab hold of the covenant but Hagar Ishmael's mum is an Egyptian a descendant of the Hamites chapter 16 verse 12 we learn that he's going to be a wild donkey of a man his hand's going to be against everyone and everyone's hand's going to be against him we also learn when we get into the Joseph story that when Joseph's brothers sell Joseph they sell him to the Midianites or the Ishmaelites who take him down to Egypt seems that Ishmael has a part to play but of course the promise line comes through Isaac and Isaac testifies to God making the impossible possible because Sarah is about a hundred years old which is no age to start mothering children but Isaac is not the serpent crusher he's still not arrived because Isaac's character and faith are shaky to say the least so then Isaac has two sons one's called Esau he becomes the father of the

Edomites or the red ones if you like he's not chosen but Jacob is the chosen one but you have to look at Jacob's family tree and wonder which one of these is the chosen promise seed you've got Reuben Simeon Levi Judah Issach Zebulun all the sons of Leah you've got Joseph and Benjamin the sons of Rachel and because they're in the middle of who's the favourite by having the most sons Zilpah Leah's maidservant is given to Jacob and she has Gad and Asher and Rachel decides well my maidservant could give you some sons and I might win so Bilhah goes in and Dan and Naphtali are born well that's mess isn't it that's like a Jeremy Kyle show waiting to happen one father four childbearing women twelve sons who don't get on at all which one of these is going to be the line of the promised seed well there's

Joseph but Joseph isn't the promised seed it's Judah that's not the obvious choice because we're going to see next week that Judah doesn't start great Judah is going to be the line of this promised seed the one descendant of Eve who will crush and bring an end to death and sin and evil forever so what part does Joseph play well I think Joseph knows that he's not a big deal he's very forgiving to his brothers he's very servant hearted in every situation he finds himself in as we read in Psalm 105 he's very wise and seeks to teach the elders and princes in Egypt wisdom he's a great example but he knows he's not the main event and

I wonder too if this isn't what we're to learn from the life of Joseph this isn't actually what we're to emulate in the life of Joseph that I'm not the main event but to point to that promised seed that you're not the main event but the goal of your life is to live a life of faith and integrity a life of wisdom and honouring God in order that that one who would come from the line of Judah would look great and be glorious we know what we read in Micah 5 but you Bethlehem Ephrathah though you are small among the clans of Judah out of you one who will be ruler over Israel whose origins are from of old from ancient times Galatians 3 the promise the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed scripture does not say and to seeds meaning many but one who is

[39 : 04] Christ Jesus says to the Pharisees if you believed Moses you would believe me because he wrote about me and in that way we're to see Joseph as a real important cog in this unfolding machine that will give us the Lord Jesus Joseph links to and points to Christ he's a vital part of the story because without him Judah wouldn't survive without him David wouldn't be born and great David's greatest son the serpent crusher that promised seed wouldn't come into the world as I've read Genesis this week over and over and over again the one thing that I've learned that's captured and provoked my thought is just how messy it is just how at every turn something goes wrong someone makes a bad choice somebody tries to go off plot and yet it's confirmed that

God is sovereign over the mess of this world and he's working out his purposes they cannot be thwarted despite people's best efforts because his serpent crusher his own son the Lord Jesus will come into the world Jesus will be the answer to all the merc and mess and sin and fallenness that we've got ourselves into the book of beginnings has a totally unsatisfactory end the promise of land while they're in Egypt the promise of the serpent crusher from the seed while Judah doesn't look like a great candidate and God has given them three covenants and they've messed up at every point and therefore the ending of Genesis just leaves us crying out for that promised seed who will come and make all things new and come and rescue and redeem forever and bring us into that land that

God has promised will be perfect and new let's pray Father God thank you that you're sovereign over the mess of this world thank you that you're sovereign over the messy decisions in our lives Father thank you that even though bad things happen that you manage to weave them together for good and so Father may we live lives like Joseph lives of integrity and faith lives of servant heartedness lives of wisdom lives lived in the fear of the Lord that you might walk with us through our days and Father that we might point as Joseph did to that promised seed who was to come into the world who would be the answer to sin and death and who would be the way that we get to be in that new creation that perfect world with you our sovereign

God so Father we pray that as we go from here to study more of Joseph Father would these lessons that we learn be dear to us glorifying to you and so helpful to those that we interact with daily that we too might point to your son the Lord Jesus Amen everything thanks ■■■■■ hmmm